

# **SELF AND SOCIETY IN THE NOVELS OF SAUL BELLOW**

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## PREFACE

Saul Bellow, as Clayton puts it, "is America's most important living novelist".<sup>1</sup> His richly ambivalent vision is manifest in his novels and it has led to various conflicting critical interpretations of his fictional oeuvre. He has been called a transcendentalist, a realist, a nihilist, a contemporary "yes-sayer" and so on. As various critics point out there are various contradictions inherent in the novels of Saul Bellow. While on the one hand, he rejects cultural nihilism, his own imagination is frightened at the emptiness of what he himself has termed as contemporary "head" culture. If he rejects alienation and affirms brotherhood and man's creatureliness, his protagonists themselves appear to be alienates. Similarly, if Bellow

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<sup>1</sup> John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense Of Man, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1970, p. 3.

furiously guards the sanctified "preserve" of the self against all sorts of depredations, he also considers it to be a hindrance to man's connection to society and universe. Again, though a Bellow protagonist quests for soul, he like Bacon can also say, "My soul hath been a stranger in the course of my pilgrimage".<sup>2</sup> These contradictions, however, do not fracture his creative vision as the contradictions of man's life do not affect its vital oneness.

Saul Bellow has generated a lot of critical interest in his own time. There are some like Clayton and Wilson who try to interpret him in psychoanalytic terms with contrasting conclusions; there are others like Malcolm Bradbury and Judie Newman who try to locate him within the historiography of modernism. Opdahl, Malin, Cohen, Rovit and others endeavour to discover his place in the tradition of liberal humanism and new transcendentalism. In a recent study Ellen Pifer has tried to demonstrate Bellow's "deepening faith in the inmost self

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2 F.G. Selby (ed.) Bacon's Essays, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. XIX.

of soul"<sup>3</sup> and has pointed out that the "massive accumulation of material fact and concrete detail tends to undermine itself" in his works.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the plenitude of critical studies few critics have tried to discover the relationship that exists between the self and society in his novels. They have either considered Bellow a champion of the self and abominator of society or a rejector of the self <sup>and an</sup> ~~or the~~ affirmer of society. My endeavour in this thesis is to demonstrate that the claims of the self and society are not mutually exclusive in the novels of Bellow. Once a person has discovered the true self, he gets serenity and detachment and can accept the society he lives in and do his own bit for it. This has been the ancient wisdom of our "rishis" and this has been the essence of the "karma yoga" of Gita.

I have divided my thesis into five chapters. The

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3 Ellen Pifer, Saul Bellow, Against the Grain, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1991, p. 3.

4 Pifer, p. 2.

first chapter deals with the world as rendered by the novelist. The second chapter deals with Bellow's conception of the self, his developing insight into the mystery of being and the efforts of the Saul Bellow protagonist to realize his true self. The third chapter deals with Saul Bellow's vision of society and how his protagonists seek connection with it. The fourth chapter is devoted to Bellow's formal strategies which he adopts to embody his insights into the highly complex and vexed question of the relationship between the self and society. The fifth chapter is just a summing-up.

I am overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude to my supervisor Dr A.N. Dwivedi, Reader in English, Allahabad University, who willingly and joyfully accepted the burden of seeing me through this arduous task. On this occasion I also remember my husband Mr. Atul Dixit with a sense of deep gratitude and affection. He constantly encouraged me to complete my research and sacrificed his comforts and joys in order to help me reach the completion of the project. I am also grateful to my parents-in-law Mr. S.N. Dixit and Mrs Saroj Dixit who treat me as their own daughter and are always ready to help me in all

my academic projects. My heart is full of love and regards for my parents Dr Sheobhushan Shukla and Mrs. Sheela Shukla without whose help and inspiration I would never have been able to complete this task.

I shall fail in my duty if I do not express my thanks, love and regards for my uncle Padma Prakash Shukla and auntie Usha Shukla who always encouraged me in my endeavour of forging ahead with my research work and sent me a few rare books from the U.S.A.

Finally, it shall be a lapse on my part if I do not express my heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Janet M. Gilligan and Mr. K. Prem of the American Centre Library who helped me generously from time to time with all the books I required for my research.

## THE WORLD OF SAUL BELLOW

"Bellow creates one of the most fully realized physical worlds in fiction".<sup>1</sup> He has created this world to support what may be called his *Weltanschauung*. It is a complex, multifaceted and living world of various hues and odours. Though it is bound by history and time, it often transcends both. Bradbury describes the city in The Victim as "a dense agglomeration of misery and competition, a place of tenuous relationship, run by mysterious blacklists and arbitrary decisions".<sup>2</sup> He further states that Bellow's city is "as in Dangling Man, a naturalist jungle, a barbarous place sliding toward the equator, stirring with energy but also unnaturally dead, filled with wild psychic

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1 Keith Michael Opdahl: The Novels of Saul Bellow an Introduction, University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978, p. 78.

2 Malcolm Bradbury: Saul Bellow, Methuen, London and New York, 1982, p. 41.

activity and barrenness in which wild furies erupt".<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, the novelist makes imaginative excursion into Africa, the heart of darkness, Mexico, the country of the plumed serpent and Europe, the seat of ancient western civilization but he mainly confines himself to America, the country of the suburbanized, bromide and media-ridden descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers.

Contemporary America, in particular, supplies the multi-colored, teeming, city background with its endless variety of characters, and the confusion of values that comes to any individual who tries to maintain 'at least <sup>an</sup> idea of himself' amid these pressures.<sup>4</sup>

The world which is portrayed in the pages of the novels of Saul Bellow does seldom form the setting. On the contrary, it is an active agent affecting the protagonists. It is a world which impinges on the consciousness of the central characters and not a world which is

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3 Bradbury, p. 43.

4 Brigitte Scheer - Schazler, Saul Bellow, Frederik Unzer Publishing Co.. New York. 1973. p. 5.

seen through the objective eyes of the writer.

According to Opdahl;

But Bellow also equates society with reality. Herzog's cities contain the same naturalistic force as Augie's Chicago and the same sensuality as Leventhal's New York. Because they are built by men, and recreate the universe in which we live, our cities embody the truth about the human as well/<sup>as</sup>the metaphysical.<sup>5</sup>

Though Saul Bellow does not like to accept any confines and it cannot be easily done also, it will not be improper to point out that Bellow's America is essentially the America of the metropolis.

And of course it is to the point that Bellow, unlike the past masters, Hemingway and Faulkner, is entirely a city writer (Henderson takes place mostly in Africa, to be sure, but not in the green hills of Africa. It is an Africa teeming

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5 Opdahl, p. 156.



with people and political intrigue, and furniture; an Africa urbanized.)<sup>6</sup>

Frank D McConnell, comparing Bellow's fiction to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, writes:

For Joyce's novel is surely one of the greatest city books ever written, a vision of Dublin as a real, historical, stone and steel complex which is nevertheless a universal myth of all cities every where, of the city (of God, of man, of the inhuman). Bellow's fiction too, as I have remarked, is extraordinarily precise and convincing in its presentation of a distinctly urban reality.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Joyce, Bellow writes of two cities, not one, Chicago and New York. Bellow was born in Chicago and many of his novels like The Dangling Man, The Adventures of Augie March and Herzog, have Chicago as its primary

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6 Marcus Klein "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction" Saul Bellow A collection of Critical essays. ed. by Earl Rovit, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Engle wood Cliffs, N.J., 1975, p. 138.

7 Frank d. McConnell, Four Postwar American Novelists, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1977, p. 19.

locale. New York appears as locale in novels like The Victim, Seize the Day and Mr. Sammler's Planet. Chicago and New York both figure prominently in Humboldt's Gift while Chicago<sup>2</sup> and Bucharest figure prominently in The Dean's December. Henderson the Rain King is the only exception to this pattern and is set in New England and Africa. There is a regular alternation of locale in each successive novel. Frank D. McConnell remarks about the significance of the two cities in Bellow's novels:

He was raised in Chicago and now lives there as a member of the University of Chicago Committee on Social thought while his residence in New York was mainly during the years which produced his grim-mest books and may well have been a somber period in his own life. But more seriously than this possible autobiographical connection, Bellow's vision of the two cities is actually a vision of alternative possibilities for the idea of the city itself and for the survival of human beings therein. His Chicago tends to be that Chicago (seen from the vantage point of youth?) which is a check-board of ethnic neighborhoods, a

nest of small-time political and financial deals where, nevertheless, people manage to survive with a kind of dogged nobility. His New York is precisely the New York of a Midwestern mind: Manhattan, a uniform corridor of granite opulence whose massive artificiality precludes even the discovery, let alone the manipulation, of creative moral roles. New York becomes the city as enmity to the self, while Chicago remains, for all its grimness, a place where thought is still possible, the city as test rather than occlusion of the shaping intellect.<sup>8</sup>

Fuchs also supports the same idea and says,

It is as if Bellow of late needs to rub two stones together to make the sparks fly.<sup>9</sup>

Bellow's portrayal of the two cities can be at times

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8 McConnell, p. 20.

9 Daniel Fuchs, Saul Bellow: Vision and revision, Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, p. 305.

surrealistic, but he is, by and large realistic, though the 'realism' is now a fallen word. Bellow does not agree with the avant garde French critic Alain Robbe Grillet that realistic novel of the nineteenth century has reached the point of exhaustion. "One can learn a good deal", writes Frank D. McConnel, "about Chicago from reading Humboldt's Gift and about Manhattan from Mr. Sammler's Planet - a claim that cannot be made for the Maryland of The Floating Opera or the New York of V".<sup>10</sup>

It is said that Bellow's heroes live in the world of their own mind. This, however, is not wholly true. Bellow's world possesses "thinginess" of its own kind which arises from his observation of small specific details and his peculiar sensitivity to small sound and colours. In the words of Marcus Klein:

Bellow's cities - Chicago and New York - are dense with neighbors and noise, with streetcars, subways, families, friends, soot and filth.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> McConnel, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Marcus Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction", p. 138.

Bellow uses distinctive images to bring the world ~~the~~ creates in his novels to life and to suggest its quality. But like Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett he can also linger on details of a thing whenever necessary. This is how Joseph muses over the news paper:

I ... settle down to read the paper in the rocker by the window. I cover it from end to end, ritualistically, missing not a word. First come the comic strips ....., then I read the serious news and the columnists, and finally the gossip, the family page, the recipes, the obituaries, the society news, the ads, the children's puzzles, everything.<sup>12</sup>

The details of food are given thus in The Adventures of Augie March:

The meals were of amazing character and of huge quantity - Anna was a strong believer in eating. Bowls of macaroni

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12 Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, Penguin Books, 1987, pp. 11-12. (All subsequent citations from this novel refer to this text)

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without salt or pepper or butter or  
sauce, brain stews and lung stews,  
calves - foot jelly with bits of calves'  
hair and sliced egg, cold pickled fish,  
crumb stuffed tripes, canned clam chow-  
der, and big bottles of orange pop.<sup>13</sup>

There are times when Saul Bellow strays into places beyond America. The Africa of Henderson the Rain King is no Chicago or New York. It is a place of primitive tribes who like the Arnewi and the Wariri have their own ways of living and who have their own mysteriousness. Africa has been called the "heart of darkness" and Bellow has tried to capture its darkness and sense of mystery in the pages of Henderson the Rain King. The life in Africa appears to be poles apart from that of America but they have one essential affinity. Both imprison the self and present a life which appears to be governed by absurdity and arbitrariness. Jonathan Wilson rightly notes that "Bellow uses the 'primitive' societies that he imagines to represent the vital and

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13 Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March, Kalyani Publishers, Ludhiana, 1953, p. 21. (All subsequent citations from this novel refer to this text)

imprisoning frame work of 'civilized' society"<sup>14</sup> and goes on to point out that the novelist used "Africa paradigmatically to represent the painful aspects of everyday life in America".<sup>15</sup> Comparing the New York of Mr. Sammler's Planet to Africa of Henderson the Rain King, he further observes:

Mr. Sammler's New York throws up a world of contradictions similar in almost every way to that of the Arnewi and the Wariri in Henderson the Rain King. But, we do not get "a fix" on Henderson in the same way as on Sammler because, on the surface anyway, Henderson "dangles" between bizarre and exotic modes of tribal behavior. Henderson is caught between arbitrary rituals of limit and mysterious magical liberations, between a world of bovine stupidity (the Arnewi) and one founded on death and violence (the Wariri). Sammler

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14 Jonathan Wilson, On Bellow's Planet, Readings from the Dark side, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985, p. 116.

15 Wilson, p. 117.

is caught between the indifferent, dull-witted police and the radical students, between the oppressive white man and the violent and angry black man.<sup>16</sup>

In the begining of The Dean's December the reader finds himself in the Rumanian Capital Bucharest in winter. The rendering of the various facets of the city is as vivid as it can be in the hands of the novelist. Jonathan Wilson remarks:

The Rumanian Capital, with its gray communist residential blocks and brown December twilights, is called up with all the grace of accuracy that in earlier novels Bellow has reserved for Chicago and New York.<sup>17</sup>

There appears to be a world of difference between Bucharest and Chicago, the city which weighs so heavily on the mind of Corde. While there is utmost regimentation in Bucharest, Chicago appears to be all clutter and confusion. Bellow, however, is not interested in superficies and goes down

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<sup>16</sup> Wilson, p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, p. 30.



to what he considers to be really "real". If one considers the effect of Bucharest and Chicago on the self one will find them the two sides of the same coin. Bellow in his portrayal of Bucharest reveals "the desiccated narcoleptic spiritual condition of the citizens as reflected in their dilapidated physical surroundings".<sup>18</sup>

Bellow's world has certain distinctive characteristics. It is maniac, acquisitive, sensual, violent, spiritually dessicated and post culture. It can be called the world of mass society, a word which has been aptly defined by Irving Howe as follows:

By the mass society we mean a relatively comfortable, half welfare and half garri-  
son society in which the population grows  
passive, indifferent and atomized; in which  
traditional loyalties, ties and associa-  
tions become lax or dissolve entirely; in  
which coherent publics based on definite  
interests and opinions gradually fall apart;

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18 Michael G. Yetman, "Toward a Language Irresistible: Saul Bellow and the Romance of Poetry" Papers on Language and Literature 22. No.4, 1986, pp. 429-47.

and in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass-produced like the products, diversions and values that he absorbs.<sup>19</sup>

In fact Bellow himself quotes De Quincey in the epigraph to The Victim about how an individual is lost in the mass society:

Be that as it may, now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal itself; the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing faces that surged upward by thousands, by myriads, by generations....<sup>20</sup>

The contemporary world is a "Pig Heaven" in which,

The shops are filled with goods and buyers.  
In the fields were the newest harvesting

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19 Irving Howe, "Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction", Partisan Review, XXVI Summer, 1959, pp. 420-36.

20 Saul Bellow, The Victim, Penguin Books, 1947, p. 7. (All subsequent citations from this novel refer to this text)

machines; in the houses, washers, dryers, freezers and refrigerators, air-conditioners, vacuum cleaners, Mixmasters, waring-blenders, television and stereophonic high-fi sets, electrical can-openers, novels condensed by the Reader's Digest and slick magazines. In the yards, glossy cars in giddy colors, like ships from outer space.<sup>21</sup>

In this world human beings become mere just another "commodity" and lose their human dignity, their ability to rebel against the system and even their insight into, what Wordsworth calls, "the life of things" ("Tintern Abbey"). Sammler's picture of New York clearly reveals Bellow's perceptions about contemporary American world:

The dark satanic mills changing into light satanic mills. The reprobates converted into children of joy, the sexual ways of the seraglio and of the Congo bush adopted by the emancipated masses of New York, Amsterdam, London!

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21 Saul Bellow, "The Sealed Treasure", The Writer's Dilemma, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 60.

He saw the increasing triumph of Enlightenment - Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Adultery! Enlightenment, universal education, universal suffrage, the rights of the majority acknowledged by all governments, the rights of women, the rights of children, the rights of criminals, the unity of the different races affirmed, Social Security, public health, the dignity of the person, the right to justice - the struggle of three revolutionary centuries being won while the feudal bonds of Church and Family weakened and the privileges of aristocracy (without any duties) spread wide, democratized especially the libidinous privileges, the right to be uninhibited, spontaneous, urinating, defecating, belching, coupling in all positions, tripling, quadrupling, polymorphous, noble in being natural, primitive, combining the leisure and luxurious inventiveness of Versailles with the hibiscus - covered erotic ease of Samoa. Dark romanticism now took hold. As old at least as the strange Orientalism of the Knights Templar, and since

then filled up with lady Stanhopes, Baudelaires, de Nervels, Stevensons, and Gouguins - those South - loving barbarians. Oh yes, the Templars. They had adored the Muslims. One hair from the head of a Saracen was more precious than the whole body of a Christian. Such crazy fervour! And now all the racism, all the strange erotic persuasions, the tourism and local colour, the exotics of it had broken up but the mental masses, inheriting every thing in a debased state, had formed an idea of the corrupting disease of being white and of the healing power of black. The dreams. The dreams of nineteenth century poets polluted the psychic atmosphere of the great boroughs and suburbs of New York. Add to this the dangerous urging staggering crazy violence of fanatics, and the trouble was very deep.<sup>22</sup>

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22 Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, Penguin Books, 1970, pp. 28-29. (All subsequent citations from this novel refer to this text)

This world of Bellow is mostly peopled either by those who are mere automatons as Fromm writes,

this powerlessness leads either to the kind of escape that we find in the authoritarian character, or else to a compulsive conforming in the process of which the isolated individual becomes an automaton, loses his self, and yet at the same time consciously conceives of himself as free and subject only to himself.<sup>23</sup>

one of its byproducts are  
Or those who have been called "reality instructors" by the novelist. People may be rich or poor, may be young or old, may be men or women, black or white, they live a mechanistic life which has lost its spontaneity and its sense of purpose. As Keith Michael Opdahl also observes:

... the city symbolizes the world's destructive power. The stainless steel and glass, the ringing of bells, the "trains rushing by under the gratings" setting off "charges of metal dust", all give a sense of the lifeless, mechanical world....<sup>24</sup>

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23 Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, New York: Rinehart, 1941, p. 241.

24 Opdahl. p. 63.

Most of them are the middle-class "business" people. In the words of the novelist, "Business was law, engineering, advertising, insurance, banking, merchandising, stock-broking, politicking".<sup>25</sup> And they were always quarrelling insensately.

Those were not animals fighting honorably for survival, they were money maniacs, they were deeply perverted, corrupt. No jungle, more like a garbage dump. Leave Darwin out of this.<sup>26</sup>

Criminality is a normal feature of this world. Rapes, theft, murder and violence abound in the fictive world of Bellow, sometimes they are attempted or thought of and some-times accomplished. It has been noted that even the protagonists of Bellow harbour criminal thoughts, though it is a different matter that more often than not they remain confined only to the world of their minds. It can be said that like Citrine they love to hang out with tough guys and under-world figures. In the words of Jonathan Wilson:

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25 Saul Bellow The Dean's December, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1982, p. 264. (All subsequent citations from this novel refer to this text)

26 Bellow, The Dean's December, p. 264.

Bellow's most sophisticated thinker/feelers love to hang out with underworld types, have a tendency to flirt with criminal behavior themselves, and often wind up in some kind of ambivalent relationship with a criminal whom they detest morally and yet find aesthetically compelling - Augie and Joe Gorman, Sammler and the black pick-pocket, Citrine and Cantabile come immediately to mind.<sup>27</sup>

This is the black side of life and it appears to be threatening the entire fabric of our civilization.

From the black side, strong currents were sweeping over everyone. Child, black, redskin - the unspoiled Seminole against the horrible Whiteman. Millions of civilized people wanted oceanic, boundless, primitive, neckfree nobility, experienced a strange release of galloping impulses, and acquired the peculiar aim of sexual niggerhood for everyone.<sup>28</sup>

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27 Wilson, p. 75.

28 Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 130.



In a way the Bellow world is a mad world. According to Irving Malin, Bellow stresses the "madness" of contemporary society. In "the Sealed Treasure" Bellow writes, "On either side we have the black and white of paranoia".<sup>29</sup> This madness usually arises from too much self-absorption, too much narcissism and too much mechanization. The world of Saul Bellow is concerned with such self-obsessed monomaniacs. Even his heroes do not escape untouched from this spiritual malaise. According to Herbert Gold:

All of Saul Bellow novels have contained intensely personal visions of desires at the dark limits of the soul where desire becomes obsession.<sup>30</sup>

Sammler in Mr. Sammler's Planet feels that he is "registrar of Madness".<sup>31</sup> He reflects on the pursuit of madness in contemporary society.

Madness makes interest. Madness is the attempted liberty of people who feel

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29 Saul Bellow, "The Sealed Treasure", p. 67.

30 Herbert Gold, "Review of Henderson the Rain King", Nation, 188 (February 21, 1989), p. 169.

31 Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 95.

themselves overwhelmed by giant forces of organized control. Seeking the magic of extremes. Madness is a base form of the religious life.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps it was the madness of things that effected Sammler most deeply.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson writes about the people who surround him:

Bruch, a distant relative tells Sammler that he masturbates behind his brief case at the sight of fleshy Puerto Rican women's arms; Feffer, a young acquaintance reports his indiscriminate bedroom adventures", and Angela Gruner comes to confide her own polymorphous sexual perversities.<sup>34</sup>

Then there are those who believe in ideal construction. This is another sort of madness and results from too much obsession with the self. People form theories of life,

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32 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 118.

33 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 115.

34 Wilson, p. 154.

they establish various forms and they have their own general plans. Joseph in Dangling Man works everything out

in accordance with a general plan. Into this plan have gone his friends, his family, and his wife. He has taken a great deal of trouble with his wife, urging her to read books of his choosing, teaching her to admire what he believes admirable.<sup>35</sup>

This is what ideal construction is, "an obsessive device." It has innumerable varieties "for study, for wisdom, bravery, war, the benefits of cruelty, for art; the God-man of the ancient cultures, the ecclesiastic, the despot, the ascetic, the millionaire, the manager".<sup>36</sup> Joseph further states:

I could name hundreds of these ideal constructions, each with its assertions

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35 Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, Penguin Books, 1987, p. 23. (Subsequent citations refer to this edition)

36 Dangling Man, p. 116.

and symbols, each finding - in conduct,  
in God, in art, in money - its particu-  
lar answer and each proclaiming: "This  
is the only possible way to meet chaos".<sup>37</sup>

Those obsessed with "ideal construction" are little dif-  
ferent from Herzog's "reality instructors":

A very special sort of lunatic expects  
to inculcate his principles, Sandor  
Himmelstein, Valentine Gersbach, Madeleine  
P. Herzog, Moses himself. Reality Ins-  
tructors. They want to teach you - to  
punish you with - the lessons of the  
Real.<sup>38</sup>

There are two kinds of Reality Instructors: first, there  
are those who try to influence your personal life and  
secondly there are those who try to interpret and alter  
human history. The first category comprises "the usual  
bunch of hypocrites, liars, bitches and knowalls that  
surround a Bellow hero"<sup>39</sup> and the second comprises per-  
sons like Shapiro, Mermelstein, Heidegger and others.

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37 The Dangling Man, p. 116.

38 Saul Bellow, Herzog, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 125.  
(Subsequent citations refer to this edition)

39 Wilson, p. 136.

All Bellow heroes leaving Henderson and Corde are Jews. Bellow does not consider himself to be a "Jewish - American writer", though as L.H. Goldman points out it cannot be construed as a "denial of his Jewishness". In her own words:

What he rejects is the categorization,  
which he views as a limiting factor.  
Bellow freely admits to his growing up  
in an Orthodox Jewish home, to Yiddish  
being his first language, to learning  
Hebrew in chedar.<sup>40</sup>

Saul Bellow may or may not be consciously pro-Jews but his world is dominated by Jews and their existential dilemmas in WASP society. The novelist is not much interested in the laws and rituals of the Jews as in their ironic vision. Bellow is aware of the Janus - faced nature of the Jews. According to him the Jews are "Chosen" and yet are "Rejected". They are chosen of God but rejects of their society and so they have

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40 L.H. Goldman, "Saul Bellow and the Philosophy of Judaism", Saul Bellow in the 1980's: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Gloria L Gronin and L.H. Goldman, Affiliated East-West Press, Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, p. 57.

learnt to value jokes and absurdities. The vital thing about Bellow's Jews is not their "Messianic vision", their family ties, their physical features but their hard and sad humour.

Bellow's world is the world of adult males. It is a world of fathers and sons: fathers may be real fathers or surrogate fathers. Children and women are present in this world but in most cases they are shadowy. Leslie Fiedler is right when he remarks that Bellow's main concern in his novels is the "emotional transactions of males inside the family: brother and brother, son and father - or father - hating son and Machiavellian surrogate father".<sup>41</sup> Joseph in Dangling Man looks on old Almstadt as his father though he cannot find one in him. Many of his friends and relations adopt him. In The Victim Leventhal becomes a father to his nephews Mickey and Phillip. Kirby Allbee is his adversary but he is "paternal" and seems to hold authority over him. Leventhal himself is a helpless son "in a world of tyrannical fathers",<sup>42</sup> and has always

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41 Leslie Fiedler, "Saul Bellow", Prairie Schooner, 31 Summer, 1957, p. 108.

42 Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Feffer & Simons, Inc. London, and Amsterdam, 1973, p. 60.

been dependent on his "business fathers". Augie March has to do with an absent father and accepts his elder brother Simon as a surrogate father. Einhorn in a way is his spiritual father. In Seize the Day the father and son relationship is a relationship of dramatic confrontation.

Here the real father, Dr. Adler, is no longer shadowy: we see his stern and proud character - not only when Tommy directly confronts him but throughout the short novel. The father is always present, lurking in his son's thoughts.<sup>43</sup>

Tamkin becomes Tommy Wilhelm's spiritual father. Tommy looks on him as an "ideal father" who understands the relationship of fathers and sons though later on he discovers that he is both narcissistic and materialistic. Like Tommy Wilhelm Henderson too is involved with many fathers. His real father who was somewhat tyrannical is dead and Henderson wants to reach him by playing his violin. However, it is in Africa that he discovers substitutes for parental authority. There is Willatale who "is a person of real substance ... not only a woman but a man at the same time".<sup>44</sup> She considers Henderson to

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43 Malin, p. 46.

44 Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, Viking Press, 1975, p.75. (Subsequent citations refer to this edition)

be a child. Then there is Bahfu the ruler of Wariri, who is searching his own father in the form of a lion. Henderson considers him to be his father. Herzog is also cast in the role of <sup>the</sup> father and tries to do his duty by June though he has neglected Marco his son by first wife Daisy. He looks for a spiritual father though his quest does not succeed and he has to fall back on himself. Sammler in Mr. Sammler's Planet finds kinship with Elya Grunjer and looks upon him for spiritual guidance.

According to Jonathan Wilson, "Bellow's imagination does not range very far where his female characters are concerned".<sup>45</sup> Leslie Fiedler repeats the same charge:

Indeed, the whole of Bellow's work is singularly lacking a real or vivid female character, where women are introduced, they appear as nympholeptic fantasies, peculiarly unconvincing.<sup>46</sup>

It is difficult to agree with such comments. Though we generally perceive women through the minds of male protagonists and they appear to lack emotional, moral and

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45 Jonathan Wilson, p. 74.

46 Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, New York: Stein & Day, 1967, p. 363.



intellectual complexity, there are some women like Iva, Madeleine, Ramona and Minnie Corde besides Mary, Thea and Mrs. Henling who are life-like and convincing. Ada Aharoni is right when she states about Bellow's women characters:

They are shown, for the most part, as forging meaningful lives for themselves, struggling, working, searching, growing, and achieving. There are modern "new" women and traditional old-world women - brilliant women and shallow materialistic ones, aging women who are trying to remain "girls" and young women and insensitive women, kind and cruel ones - in one phrase-a whole world peopled by not only men but also by women.<sup>47</sup>

This is the kind of the world in which Bellow's protagonists try to explore the true nature of self and social reality.

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<sup>47</sup> Ada Aharoni, "Women in Saul Bellow's Novels", Studies in American Jewish Literature 3 (1983), pp. 99-112.

## 2

## THE QUEST FOR THE SELF

## I

The quest for the self is the main concern of Bellow in all his novels right from Dangling Man to The Dean's December. His fictional world is rich and various. He makes various experiments in form and technique. But whatever his form or whatever his technique his basic theme is the desire to know, as Joseph puts it to himself in Dangling Man, "what we are and what we are for".<sup>1</sup> This desire has continued to tease human thought for ages but it has become particularly compelling in the present day theories, technologies and numbers ridden society which has lost its cultural, religious and ethical moorings. Bellow has been in a way obsessed with the question of the self which can engage itself

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<sup>1</sup> Dangling Man, p. 128.

with the outer world without loss of selfhood. It is in fact a recurrent motif in his fictional works.

The problem of the self has been considered most baffling and various social, biological, psychological and philosophical theories have been put forward to explain it. Saul Bellow is a creative writer and dislikes to be tied down to any particular theory. What he does is to strip the various veils covering the mystery of the inner being and to discover what the self, which is the essence of human existence, really looks like. Saul Bellow puts this problem in the following words:

And what has struck artists in this century as the most amusing part of all, is that the descriptions of self that still have hold of us are made up of the old unitary foursquare traits noted according to the ancient conventions. What we insist on seeing is not a quaintly organized chaos of instinct and spirit, but what we choose to call "the personality"-- a presentably combed and dressed

someone who is decent, courageous, handsome, or not so handsome, but strong or not so strong but certainly generous, or not so generous, but anyway reliable.<sup>2</sup>

Every novel of Bellow can be called "Song of Myself" because he celebrates himself in it. His protagonists are various reincarnations of himself though it will be wrong to say that the novelist identifies himself with any character or makes him his voice. The protagonist is the central consciousness of the novel and other characters are generally, though not always, seen through the mind of the protagonist. Besides the other characters constitute the oppressive and hostile society which the protagonist finds it difficult to respond affirmatively. So the quest for the self is carried by the novelist through his protagonists. Opdahl rightly remarks:

Bellow creates one of the most fully realized physical worlds in fiction, and his use of irony implies a stan-

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2 Saul Bellow, "Where Do We Go From Here: The Future of Fiction", The Theory of the American Novel, ed. George Perkins, Rinehart editions, 1970, pp. 443-44.

dard outside of the work, but the vision of the novel is ultimately that of the central character.<sup>3</sup>

The heroes of his novels, and all of them are about his heroes, are all the time occupied with the business of "discovering themselves rather than inventing themselves".<sup>4</sup> They appear to be solipsistic and withdrawn from society reliving their past experiences and absorbing the present ones but in reality their gaze is drawn towards the "craters of the spirit ... to know our purpose, to seek grace".<sup>5</sup>

Martin Buber makes a significant remark when he says:

In order to be able to go out to the other you must have the starting place, you must have been, you must be, with yourself.<sup>6</sup>

~~The~~ Bellow's heroes try to be themselves before going out

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3 Opdahl, pp. 7-8.

4 Opdahl, p. 24.

5 Dangling Man, p. 128.

6 Martin Buber, "Dialogue", Four Existentialist Theologians, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 174.

to others. Unlike the code hero of Hemingway, a typical product of the "era of hard-boiledness", they "address themselves frequently" and feel "no shame at making a record of their inward transactions".<sup>7</sup> As Joseph rightly points out, "Most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled" <sup>8</sup> who strangle their emotions and express their feelings, if they have any, according to the correct "ways of indicating them". Bellow's heroes are practised in introspection and lay bare their hearts in trying to define what is real.

The usual Bellow novel is the novel of meditation. The Bellow heroes might be depressive and alienated ones like Joseph, Asa Leventhal, and Tommy Wilhelm, they might be adventurous ones like Augie March and Henderson or they might be meditative ones like Herzog, Sandler, Citrine and Corde, they are the Columbuses of their own psyche, their own soul. Alan Chavkin remarks:

The novel is a version of the characteristic genre of the English romantics - the discursive meditation. The real focus, as

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7 Dangling Man, p. 7.

8 Dangling Man, p. 7.

in so many romantic poems, is on capturing the process of the mind seeking to come to terms with its anxiety as it recollects, renders and endows the past with order and meaning.<sup>9</sup>

To a large extent this remark is applicable to the Bellow novels where the human soul is the register of everything which happens in the world, of every person that encounters the hero directly or indirectly, of every experience which depresses or elates him and of every higher issue which dangles before him.

To be subjective and not sloppy is a difficult task for any creative writer. Bellow, however, does not fail in fulfilling this task and this perhaps is one of the factors which contribute to his greatness. Though the protagonists of the novelist wallow in feelings and emotions, contend with various ideas and ideologies and try to penetrate the veils of human mystery, their journey through their psyche is not a sentimental journey and seldom incurs the risk of being tedious and

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9 Alan Chavkin, "Bellow and English Romanticism", Studies in the Literary Imagination 17, no. 2 (1984), pp. 7-18.

boring, dry and dull. The novelist uses certain subtle methods to allow the protagonists to achieve a sort of distance from their own experiences. They are self-immersed but not self-lost. They participate in their psychic drama but they are witnesses to it also. It is difficult not to agree with Keith Cpdaht when he says:

Bellow's development as a writer is in many ways determined by his search for distance from the suffering in his fiction. He has brought his heroes into ever closer contact with pain at the same time that he has sought to temper its immediacy.<sup>10</sup>

In trying to discover the self the Bellow protagonist considers his own thoughts, feelings and experiences from a certain distance and is thus saved from being lost in a sea of confusion. He, however, neither forms any theory nor subscribes to one. He may have thoughts but they are felt and not abstract. According to Bellow the besetting sin of the contemporary society is to reduce everything to explanation. Mr. Sammler

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<sup>10</sup> Cpdaht, p. 18.



comments on this obsession of mankind:

Being right was largely a matter of explanations. Intellectual man had become an explaining creature. Fathers to children, wives to husbands, lecturers to listeners, experts to laymen, colleagues to colleagues, doctors to patients, man to his own *soul*, explained. The roots of this, the causes of the other, the source of events, the history, structure the reasons why.<sup>11</sup>

The protagonist in *Bellow* distrusts what Sammler calls "superstructures of explanation". Augie too is tired of "Machiavellians":

I'm good and tired of all these big personalities, destiny-moulders, and heavy-water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big wheels and imposers-upon, absolutists.<sup>12</sup>

H. Porter Abbott aptly remarks:

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11 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 5.

12 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 524.

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Bellow's sensitivity to the destructive power of fixed categories led him, in his work after Dangling Man, to draw a rather large circle around the self and post it.<sup>13</sup>

The self for a Bellow hero is a preserve against the intrusions of theorists and depredations of idealogues. It is difficult to grasp reality through "corruption of intelligence" proliferating in the form of various concepts. Albert Corde realizes the futility of such concepts in exploring the human soul-scape:

We prefer to have such things served up to us as concepts. We'd rather have them abstract, stillborn, dead. But as long as they don't come to us with some kind of reality, as facts of experience, then all we can have instead of good and evil is ... well, concepts. Then we'll never learn how the soul is worked on. Then for intellectuals there will be discourse or jargon, while for the public

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13 W. Porter Abbot, "Saul Bellow and the 'Lost Cause' of Character", Novels: A Forum on Fiction, Vol. 13, 3 (Spring 1980), pp. 264-83.

there will be ever more jazzed-up fantasy. In fact, the two are blending now. The big public is picking up the jargon to add to its fantasies...<sup>14</sup>

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14 The Dean's December, p. 243.

## II

It would be worthwhile to examine how various protagonists of Saul Bellow look at the problem of the self. Joseph in Dangling Man, which also happens to be the first novel of Bellow, can be considered to be the progenitor of all of them. Jonathan Wilson discovers familial likeness between Albert Corde, the hero of The Lean's December, a recent novel of Bellow, and Joseph:

Both novels are stark winter's tales dependent for their light on the vivid interior worlds of their respective protagonists. Like Albert Corde, Joseph, the hero of Dangling Man, is a sequestered individual confined for most of his novel to a grubby Chicago rooming house. Beyond the closed windows of Joseph's apartment, chill winds, fog, and deep winter darkness contribute to an environment that is altogether as gloomy as Albert Corde's Bucharest.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wilson, p. 39.

Dangling Man first published in 1944 when the world war II was in full blaze is by no means a war novel. Joseph, the hero has given up his job and is waiting for the draft. He lives on the salary of his wife Iva in a rented room. Originally he has planned to use his leisure for writing some biographical essays but now isolated from society he finds:

There is nothing to do but wait, or  
dangle, and grow more and <sup>more</sup> dispirited.  
It is perfectly clear to me that I am  
deteriorating, storing bitterness and  
spite which eat like acids at my endow-  
ment of generosity and good will.<sup>16</sup>

Threatened by the forces of disintegration he prepares himself to confront the most basic question: "But I must know what I myself am".<sup>17</sup> He examines his past and present, his relationship with others and the world, the question of personal responsibility and pure freedom and in a truly significant sense his human existence.

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<sup>16</sup> Dangling Man, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Dangling Man, p. 99.

His mind, as Opdahl observes:

ranges over the philosophic and the trivial, the past and the future, his guilt and his dreams, his walks and his boarding house neighbours.<sup>18</sup>

Not only this he tries to make distinctions between various things, "between the old Joseph and the new, his mind and his will, his mildness and his hasty temper, his enslavement by history and his struggle for freedom".<sup>19</sup> What he discovers is that his consciousness is a welter of various perceptions and feelings, that a thing may have several explanations and that the self can be defined in several ways. All the same he discovers certain essential truths about human nature: a person cannot have freedom unless he appreciates it in others, his violence arises out of his fear of the societal encroachment upon his private consciousness and a person is unwilling to recognize the unsavoury aspects of his personality when they appear embodied in others. Over and above, he feels that the self cannot retain its integrity

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<sup>18</sup> Opdahl, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Opdahl, p. 30.

and identity if it stays in isolation from others.

All these things become apparent from his relationship with his wife, his quarrel with Vanaker and Etta and his dialogues with the Spirit of Alternatives. Iva is an independent type of woman, both young and energetic and supports Joseph when he is waiting for induction into the army. She desires that Joseph should use his leisure to write his book on Diderot. But this generates an emotional crisis in Joseph. He feels that he is kept of his wife and his in-laws appear to be accusing him of living at Iva's expense. He looks down upon his wife's interest in "clothes, appearance, furniture, light entertainment".<sup>20</sup> He tells himself that

Women ... were not equipped by training to resist such things. You might force them to read Jacob Boehme for ten years without diminishing their appetite for them; you might teach them to admire Walden but never convert them to wearing old clothes.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Dangling Man, p. 81.

21 Dangling Man, p. 81.

He feels estranged from his wife and turns towards Kitty Daumler. But all this psychic trouble leads him to a new insight into the meaning of freedom. He realizes that Iva may not like to change, that her freedom might be as dear to herself as his is to himself. With regard to his affair with Kitty he feels:

It did not take me long to see that at the root of it all was my unwillingness to miss anything. A compact with one woman puts beyond reach what others might give us to enjoy; the soft blondes and the dark, amorphous women of our imaginations are set aside. Shall we leave life not knowing them? Must we? Aridity again. As soon as I recognized it, I began to bring the affair with Kitty to a close.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Joseph develops a new understanding of Iva. As Ada Aharoni remarks:

Bellow brings his protagonist to a full realization that Iva is not only his wife

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22 Dangling Man, p. 83.



but a person in her own right, with tastes of her own and a personality of her own, and that he has to accept her the way she is.<sup>23</sup>

There are other significant experiences. Old Vanaker is a troublesome neighbour. He is according to Mrs. Briggs engaged to marry a lady of sixty who insists that he be converted to the Catholic faith. His mind is in conflict about which faith to choose, Catholic or the Masonic Scottish Rite. "It may be this conflict of principle that drives him to get up at two in the morning to change the position of his bed".<sup>24</sup> He celebrated "the birth of the new year with large quantities of Whisky with coughing, pelting the yard with bottles with frequent, noisy trips to the lavatory, and ended his revels with a fire".<sup>25</sup> Joseph assaults Vanaker in the course of the novel but that really hurts him. Marcus Klein very aptly remarks:

His free self becomes burdensome to him

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<sup>23</sup> Aharoni, pp. 99-112.

<sup>24</sup> Dangling Man, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Dangling Man, p. 65.

and he has a continuous lesson in the end of ordinary free self-hood in Vaneker, the lonely disgusting old man next door, grunting, hacking, theiving, and smelling away his existence.<sup>26</sup>

He is violent towards others. He punches his former landlord Mr. Gessel and spanks his niece Otta. After a dinner at the home of his brother Anon, Otta tells him to stop playing his badyn record because he has had his turn. She wants the Ougat records that her mother had given her. Some hot words are exchanged and Joseph pulls her over his knee trapping both her legs in his and spanks her. According to Jonathan Wilson:

the act clearly suggests a measure of Joseph's sexual attraction for his niece; it suggests further that he has repressed it and that the repression has given rise to a mildly violent assault.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Klein, p. 148.

27 Wilson, p. 49.

A touch of repressed sensuality is hidden in the following:

I did not release her at once, she no longer fought against me, but with her long hair reaching nearly to the floor and her round, nubile things bare, lay in my lap.<sup>28</sup>

He tries to probe his animosity towards Ette who "so closely resembles" him and he comes to a significant discovery:

The search for an answer takes me far into my earlier history, a field I do not always find agreeable but which yields a great deal of essential information. And there I discover that the face, all faces, had a significance for me duplicated in no other object. A similarity of faces must mean a similarity of nature and presumably of fate.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Dangling Man, p. 58.

29 Dangling Man, p. 61.

he realizes that "Atta's spite might reflect a mutual corruption".<sup>30</sup>

Frank D. McConnell calls "Tu As Raison Aussi" or "The spirit of Alternatives" "Joseph's own mocking, ironic spectre".<sup>31</sup> A series of interior conversations with him, when he becomes totally alienated from all but a few minor characters, helps him to gain a real view of his own psyche:

The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria, I must be concerned with them, naturally. I must take account of them. They can obliterate me. But, as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny in spite of them.<sup>32</sup>

He, however, is not certain if he can have "a separate destiny". Joseph tells Tu As Raison Aussi when he asks the former about it

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30 Opdahl, p. 39.

31 McConnell, p. 11.

32 Danaling Man, p. 140.

I'm not ready to answer. I have nothing to say to that now.<sup>33</sup>

But the end of the novel, however, reveals that his answer is to be "no".

The next novel tries to discover whether the self is a victim or a victimiser. Ass Leventhal is a Jew working at the trade magazine in New York and is left alone by his wife's visit to her mother. He suffers from "hypochondria" and feels that he has made such mistakes in life that he could have been very well pushed to the lot of those who were social rejects:

He had almost fallen in with that part of humanity of which he was frequently mindful (he never forgot the hotel on lower Broadway), the part that did not get away with it - the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined.<sup>34</sup>

He feels that he is a victim and that his boss, his brother's wife Elena, her mother and even his friend Williston

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33 Dangling Man, p. 140.

34 The Victim, pp. 23-24.

intend to persecute him because of his being a Jew. He is, however, accused of being a victimiser by Kirby Allbee, a Gentile who tried to be of help to him in the past.

Opdahl remarks:

But each man victimizes the other because he is a victim of himself: Jew and Gentile, victim and bigot, both men suffer from the self-persecution of imaginary fears.<sup>35</sup>

Leventhal feels society to be anti-Semitic, Allbee feels it to be anti-Gentile:

Sometimes I feel- and I'm saying this seriously - I feel as if I were in a sort of Egyptian darkness. You, know, Moses punished the Egyptians with darkness. And that's how I often think of this. When I was born, when I was a boy, everything was different.<sup>36</sup>

Allbee tells Leventhal that he is responsible for his losing his job, the desertion by his wife and her death and his present miserable position. He aggravates the

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<sup>35</sup> Opdahl, p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> The Victim, p. 121.

fears of Leventhal about his uncertain and contingent position.

But you shouldn't forget that luck cuts  
both ways and be prepared, and when  
you're in my position - if you ever are.  
That's the whole thing that if.<sup>37</sup>

Allbee creates a turmoil in Leventhal's consciousness and he is outraged by the allegations laid against him. He seeks the advice of his friends but it is of no avail. By his actions and words Allbee makes Leventhal to examine his self and the result is that he is able to recognize essential humanity in his supposed foe. According to Clayton:

Asa acknowledges his responsibility,  
offers help, and understands that Allbee  
is a suffering human, not merely his  
persecutor.<sup>38</sup>

Comparing Leventhal to Velchaninov of Dostoyevsky's The

37 The Victim, p. 166.

38 John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In defense of Man  
(Second ed.), Indiana University Press, 1979, p. 142.

eternal Husband, Clayton makes very pertinent remarks:

But in both cases there is the need for the attempted murder, the physical scuffle, the expulsion. Afterwards each hero is healed. Velchaninov is no longer sick, no longer depressive; Leventhal's health is also improved, and he is happier, less burdened.<sup>39</sup>

Tommy Wilhelm is another victim hero. According to Opdahl, he is "like the other heroes, a victim of society".<sup>40</sup> He is without a job and does not have money even to pay his hotel bills as he has lost it to the cheats around him. His wife whom he has deserted is out to "murder" him by her excessive demands for money (alimony). His father does not help him because, "It was not fair for the better man of the two, and the more useful, the more admired to leave the world first".<sup>41</sup> Even Tamkin whom he considers to be a surrogate father and who professes that his "real calling is to be a healer" turns out to be a cheat. Life is a burden for Wilhelm:

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<sup>39</sup> Clayton, p. 142.

<sup>40</sup> Opdahl, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> Saul Bellow, Seize The Day, Penguin Books, 1987, p. 54.



The spirit, the peculiar burden of his existence lay upon him like an accretion, a load, a lump. In any moment of quiet, when sheer fatigue prevented him from struggling, he was apt to feel this mysterious weight, this growth or collection of nameless things which it was the business of his life to carry about. That must be what a man was for.<sup>42</sup>

But Wilhelm is more a victim of himself than of society. He is masochistic and likes to depend on others. As Opdahl says, the "people around him are really weapons for suicide".<sup>43</sup> He denies his father's name and thus an important part of himself because father's name is not merely a name but a representative of biological and social forces. He knows that he is going to commit a mistake in doing something and yet he does it. He knows that his father wants to be left alone but enters into a bitter argument with him. His belief in Tamkin and giving him his money after testing "the peculiar flavour of fatality"<sup>44</sup> in him is a similar mistake.

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42 Brigitte Scheer - Schazler, p. 66.

43 Opdahl, p. 109.

44 Opdahl, p. 110.

Ironically enough it is the con man Tamkin who makes him realize certain truths of life. Although he himself may not live up to his values, he prepares Wilhelm for his spiritual re<sup>er</sup>eneration which comes at the end in the form of hero's crying at the corpse of an unknown man. Tamkin tells the protagonist that "money making" is a murderous social activity.

Money-making is aggression. That's the whole thing. The functionalistic explanation is the only one. People come to the market to kill ... only they haven't got the genuine courage to kill, and they erect a symbol of it. The money.<sup>45</sup>

Tamkin also distinguishes the true self from the accretions that gather around it:

In here, the human bosom - mine, your's everybody's - there isn't just one soul. There's a lot of souls. But there are two main ones, the real soul and a pretender soul.<sup>46</sup>

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45 Brigitte Scheer-Schazler, p. 67.

46 Seize the Day, p. 70.

he defines "pretender soul" in the following words:

"gotism, pure and simple. It's a way  
to love the pretender soul. Vanity.  
Only vanity, is what it is. And social  
control."<sup>47</sup>

"The true soul loves the truth,"<sup>48</sup> according to him. The true and ultimate needs of a person arise out of this. The pretender soul generates self-destructive tendencies. Wilhelm has to get rid of his pretender soul and be himself.

Augie is one of the adventurer heroes and is questing after what he calls "an independent fate".<sup>49</sup> He is endowed with moral, intellectual and emotional extravagance and has a great capacity for accepting all people and experiences. He is surrounded by Machiavellians - Bellow originally wanted to title the novel "Life Among the Machiavellians" - like Grandma Lausch, Einhorn, Mrs Renling, Simon March, Thea Fenchel, Hymie Basteshaw, Stella Chesney and Mintouchain.<sup>l</sup> He eludes the defini-

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<sup>47</sup> Seize the Day, p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> Seize the Day, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> The Adventures of Augie March, p. 401.

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tions and life styles offered by them and has a mixed feeling of love and inner dislike for them. Though he admires Grandma Lausch and Einhorn, he has a secret satisfaction that they are destroyed by the very principles they try to teach. Grandma is sent to a home by her hard-boiled sons and Einhorn is ruined because of his own vindictiveness. Augie moves in a world of endless random energy, of material and men, ideas and influences:

There's too much of everything of this kind, that's come home to me, too much history and culture to keep track of, too many details, too much news, too much example, too much influence, too many guys to tell you to be as they are, and all this hugeness, abundance, turbulence, Niagara Falls torrent. Which who is supposed to interpret? Me?<sup>50</sup>

In fact as Bradbury puts it:

all things seem to interest in the flow of history, the interaction of races

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50 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 455.

and classes, intellectual theories and their 'terrible appearances' within the world.<sup>51</sup>

Augie's consciousness is conflicted between the desire to break free from the domination of those he calls "destiny moulders"<sup>52</sup> and his longing for deep attachment to a mentor - whether brother, wife or lover. The conflict appears to be irresoluble. Augie himself realizes:

I didn't want to be what they made of me but wanted to please them. Kindly explain! An independent fate, and love too - what confusion!<sup>53</sup>

But in fact, there is no real confusion between them. Augie adds immediately to what he has said earlier.

I must be a monster to make such confusion.<sup>54</sup>

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51 Bradbury, p. 51.

52 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 524.

53 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 40.

54 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 10.

The fact is that a shift in Augie's character is ignored by critics like Tony Tanner and Jonathan Wilson. At first Augie stores up all sorts of experiences joyously in Chicago but later on he gets disillusioned with the Machiavellians and the city he lives in. He falls in love with Thea Fenchel and goes to Mexico. Now he turns inward and tries to discover his self by feeling and judging his experience. According to Wilson:

In Mexico, however, because the characters who surround him are a little more shadowy, Augie himself begins to come into his own. And it is while staying in Thea Fenchel's ironically named Casa Descuitada (carefree house) that Augie comes closest to understanding the true nature of his quest for an "independent fate".<sup>55</sup>

Opdahl too has a similar opinion to state:

He too, like Weyl, is not the man he thought he was - a discovery that destroys the identity that supported him.<sup>56</sup>

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55 Wilson, p. 92.

56 Opdahl, p. 88.

He records:

And suddenly my heart felt ugly. I was sick of myself. I thought that my aim of being simple was just a fraud, that I wasn't a bit good hearted or affectionate...<sup>57</sup>

Because of his insights, his broodings and his recognition of the true nature of things he is able to discover "axial lines of life":

I must have had a feeling since I was a kid about these axial lines which made me want to have my existence on them, and I have said 'no' like a stubborn fellow to all my persuaders, just on the obstinacy of my memory of these lines, never entirely clear. But lately I have felt these thrilling lines again. When striving stops, there they are as a gift. I was lying on the couch here before and they suddenly went quivering right straight through me.

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57 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 401.

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truth, love peace, bounty, usefulness,  
harmony! And all noise and grates, dis-  
tortion, chatter, distraction, effort,  
superfluity, passed off like something  
unreal.<sup>58</sup>

A person who discovers these "axial lines" can live life  
significantly and truly.

He will live with true joy. Even his  
pains will be joy if they are true,  
even his helplessness will not take away  
his power, even wandering will not take  
him away from himself, even the big  
social jokes and hoaxes need not make  
him ridiculous, even disappointment  
after disappointment need not take away  
his love. Death will not be terrible  
to him if life is not.<sup>59</sup>

It is a different matter that Augie fails in his search  
for a "fate good enough". In the words of Opdahl:

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58 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 454.

59 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 455.



Eager to serve humanity, Augie makes his living by bribing European officials in order to sell surplus pharmaceutical goods on the black market. He has decided that love and home alone are a worthwhile fate but he is deprived of both by Stella's obsession with a previous lover....<sup>60</sup>

This, however, does not matter. Augie concludes the novel with the following words:

I may well be flop at this line of endeavor.<sup>u</sup> Columbus too thought he was a floppy probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America.<sup>61</sup>

Henderson, who is another adventurer hero, is the first Gentile protagonist of Bellow. He is an Anglo-Saxon millionaire of New England Protestant family, "recipient to a large heritage of wealth, historical responsibility and social service, a massive access to the history of

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<sup>60</sup> Opdahl, p. 93.

<sup>61</sup> The Adventures of Augie March, p. 536.

American and Western Culture".<sup>62</sup> He is a man of excess both in body and mind. His adventures are the story of his inner voice that cries "I want, I want, I want, oh I want ...."<sup>63</sup> and his drive to burst his spirit's sleep and as a spiritual explorer in mythic Africa to plumb "the greater or the deeper facts of life". Henderson has murderous impulses and suffers because of his malice towards others. In the words of Opdahl:

He fights with the police, harasses his wife, and threatens strangers. He wrestles pigs, tries to kill a cat, and threatens suicide. He finally murders when the noise of his rage kills the family cook.<sup>64</sup>

Henderson is "the embodiment of mid-twentieth century America, bursting with vital energy, at the very peak of prosperity"<sup>65</sup> but afflicted by "vague malaise, the sense

62 Bradbury, p. 58.

63 Henderson the Rain King, p. 12.

64 Opdahl, p. 120.

65 Eusebio L. Rodriguez, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction, East Brunswick, N.J. London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981, p. 115.

of aimless drift and unused energy".<sup>66</sup> His journey to Africa is a journey into his own self. He thinks "May be every guy has his own Africa".<sup>67</sup> In fact, Henderson's Africa is a metaphor of his inmost being. Henderson's quest for the self is a solemn one but he himself is comic. Bellow calls him "the absurd seeker of higher qualities".<sup>68</sup> He is a "becomer" who is running after "Being". "Becoming" is ceaseless striving but "Being" means spiritual calm and harmony. Henderson observes about Be-ers and Becomers in the following way:

Being people have all the breaks. Becoming people are very unlucky, always in a tizzy. The Becoming people are always having to make explanations or offer justifications to the Being people.<sup>69</sup>

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66 Norman Podhoretz, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow", Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing, New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1964, p. 225.

67 Henderson the Rain King, p. 275.

68 Nina Steers, "Successor to Faulkner?" Show, IV (Nov. 1964), p. 38.

69 Henderson the Rain King, p. 160.

Bellow in an interview with Nina Steers tries to explain Being and Becoming on similar lines:

He tells the King that he is a 'Becomer' and that the King is a 'Reer'. I believe I meant him to say that human life is intolerable if we must endure endless doubt. That is really what I feel is motivating Henderson.<sup>70</sup>

Henderson becomes aware of these spiritual realities only when he comes into contact with two opposite tribes Arnewi and Wariri, embodying "two contrasting states of history, culture and psychic relation to nature".<sup>71</sup> His first encounter is with the Arnewi, the people of suffering and loving passivity, who cannot kill the frogs which are contaminating their cistern of water while the land is under the curse of drought. Bradbury remarks:

Their language contains no oppositions and they live by an unambitious goodness, removed from Henderson's desire to burst his spirit's sleep.<sup>72</sup>

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70 Nina Steers, p. 38.

71 Bradbury, p. 59.

72 Bradbury, p. 61.

Their queen Willatale can find joy even in the midst of sorrow. She has accepted the world but "risen above ordinary human conditions".<sup>73</sup> Henderson feels that the queen can show him the path to liberation:

I believed the queen could straighten me out if she wanted to, as if, any minute now, she might open her hand and show me the thing, the source, the germ - the cipher. The mystery, you know. I was absolutely convinced she must have it .... It comforted me just to see her, and I thought I might learn to be sustained too if I followed her example. And altogether I felt my hour of liberation was drawing near when the sleep of spirit was liable to burst.<sup>74</sup>

But Henderson misses this opportunity because of his egotism and fears.

The drought has already been recognized as internal ('As we turned away I felt

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73 Henderson the Rain King, p. 75.

74 Henderson the Rain King, p. 79.

as though that cistern of problem water with its algae and its frogs had entered me, occupying a square space in my interior, and sloshing around as I moved') and the disaster is Henderson's too. Unable to acquiesce in the given, able to counter stagnation only with excess vitality and technique, he has to leave in disgrace and humiliation, "having demolished both the water and my hopes. From now I'd never learn more about the grun-tu-molani".<sup>75</sup>

Henderson is now led to another tribe, the Wariri, by his guide Nomilayu. "where the Arnewi manifest a 'female' peacefulness and acceptance, the Wariri manifest a 'male' energy and force".<sup>76</sup> Clayton is right when he remarks:

However, the essential function of the Wariri and of their chief Dahfu is to change Henderson by shattering his ego

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75 Bradbury, p. 62.

76 Bradbury, p. 62.

and forcing him to confront the Real.  
 He must go beyond "man-want-to-live"  
 to the understanding which permits  
 life.<sup>77</sup>

Dahfu, like, Willetale, has a "gift of life" "based upon his intensification of his tribe's manner and values".<sup>78</sup>  
 "He seemed all ease, and I all limitation. He was extended, floating; I was contracted and cramped".<sup>79</sup> While the Queen of the Arrowl felt that nothing bad happened, Dahfu had a theory how to overcome evil. The King advocated "interaction between the flesh and the mind",<sup>80</sup> and believed that everything originated in the brain and that man creates his own body. As Opdahl observes Henderson reflects some of Dahfu's theories:

He regrets his lion adventures, thinking that under Willetale he "might have been learning about the grun-tu-molani instead". Although he himself would assert an autonomous will, he dismisses Dahfu's theory of the imagination as a "bourgeois idea of the autonomy of the individual

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77 Clayton, p. 178.

78 Opdahl, p. 130.

79 Henderson the Rain King, p. 160.

80 Opdahl, p. 131.

mind". During the lion<sup>hunt</sup> he thinks that  
"this was all mankind needed, to be conditioned into the image of a ferocious animal like the one below".<sup>81</sup>

Henderson after being cured from the Jariri has developed significant insights into reality. He is now able to see through the fallacious illusion created by Ishfu's theories and realizes that what his soul yearns is the wisdom of Willatale. He runs away from the Jariri and on his way back to America in the company of a lion cub supposed to embody his own soul, he lands in New foundland where "he finds a state of joy in which he can run freely".<sup>82</sup>  
Opdahl rightly remarks:

By the end of his African journey Henderson can face both the internal and the external reality. Unlike Augie March, who at the end of The Adventures flees a cold "specter of white anger" by the sea, Henderson is at home in the cold.<sup>83</sup>

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81 Opdahl, p. 135.

82 Henderson the Rain King, p.

83 Opdahl, p. 138.



"If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me. Thought Moses Herzog".<sup>84</sup> But Herzog is really in his mind at the outset of the novel. Dutton remarks,

Thus Herzog's mind is the setting for the action, much of it backward moving.<sup>85</sup>

Whatever, is happening is happening in the world of his mind. It is only towards the end of the novel that he is literally able to go out of his mind and he repeats the first sentence of the novel. Herzog is the first protagonist who consciously undergoes the process of close self examination:

Lying on the sofa of the kitchenette apartment he had rented on 17th Street, he sometimes imagined he was an industry that manufactured personal history, and saw himself from birth to - death.<sup>86</sup>

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That brought him to consider his character. What sort of character was it? Well

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84 Herzog, p. 1.

85 Herzog, p. 117.

86 Herzog, p. 3.

in the modern vocabulary, it was narcissistic; it was masochistic; it was anachronistic .... If you believed, as every one nowadays apparently did, that man was the sick animal, then was he even spectacularly sick, exceptionally blind, extraordinarily degraded? No was he intelligent? His intellect would have been more effective if he had had an aggressive paranoid character, eager for power. He was jealous but not exceptionally competitive, not a true paranoiac. And what about his learning? He was obliged to admit, now, that he was not much of a professor, either. Oh, he was earnest, he had a certain large, immature sincerity, but he might never succeed in becoming systematic.<sup>87</sup>

In his self-examination Herzog has to reach his true self tearing the accretions of illusions, doubts, contradictions and abstractions which have collected around it.

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87 Herzog, p. 4.

The process is not easy because he wishes to put everything in language -- writes letters which are never posted:

I've been writing letters helter-skelter in all directions. More words. I go after reality with language. Perhaps I'd like to change it all into language, to force, Madeleine and Gersbach to have a Conscience. There's a word for you. I must be trying to keep tight the tensions without which human beings can no longer be called human. If they don't suffer, they've gotten away from me. And I've filled the world with letters to prevent their escape. I want them in human form, and so I conjure up a whole environment and catch them in the middle. I put my whole heart into these constructions. But they are constructions.<sup>88</sup>

He stops writing letters only when he has realized the truth about himself. Reality can be felt only intuitively,

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88 Herzog, p. 272.

it transcends language:

He went around and entered from the front, wondering what further evidence of his sanity, besides refusing to go to the hospital, he could show. Perhaps he'd stop writing letters. Yes, that was what was coming, in fact. The knowledge that he was done with these letters. Whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell, really seemed to be passing, really going.<sup>89</sup>

In the process of reaching out towards reality and following the classical dictum of "know thyself," Herzog examines various interpersonal relationships especially towards women. Herzog an intellectual chases many women, as he chases many theories, Wanda, Sono, Zinka, Daisy, Madeleine and Ramona: all occupy his mind at one time or the other.

What a lot of romances! thought Herzog.  
One after another, were those my real career?<sup>90</sup>

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89 Herzog, p. 341.

90 Herzog, p. 166.

He deserts Daisy because:

Stability, symmetry, order, containment were Daisy's strength .... By my irregularity and turbulence of spirit I brought out the very worst in Daisy. I caused the seams of her stockings to be so straight, and the buttons to be buttoned symmetrically. I was behind those rigid curtains and underneath the square carpets. Roast breast of veal every Sunday with bread stuffing like clay was due to my disorders, my huge involvement - huge but evidently formless - in the history of thought.<sup>91</sup>

Herzog realizes that what is Daisy's strength is a part of his own self too and his rebellion is against that part of his self. Sono and Ramona embody sensuality and they cannot make him content and so he has fled Sono and is trying to escape Ramona. The latter is a "sort of sexual professional (or priestess)", "a true sack

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91 Herzog, pp. 126-27.

artist.<sup>92</sup> The question Herzog asks himself is:

But is that the secret goal of my vague pilgrimage? Do I see myself to be after long blundering an unrecognized son of Sodom and Monyrus - an Orobic tyne?<sup>93</sup>

Herzog's involvement with Madeleine sets his entire being into turmoil. She is brilliant, beautiful, ambitious, restless, aggressive and outspoken. He painfully struggles to get rid of his passion for her which "is the psychocenter of the novel".<sup>94</sup> He calls her a "bitch" and feels hurt because she has deserted him after possessing his name, money and reputation for Gersbach. It is only towards the end that Herzog is able to realize that he has not been able to understand Madeleine, that he has been possessive and jealous and that he has been self-absorbed all the time. To put it into the words of Dutton:

On one level he is trying to do the impossible - to find happiness through outer

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92 Herzog, p. 17.

93 Herzog, p. 17.

94 Aharoni, pp. 99-112.

sources - to supplement himself, so to speak, through these love affairs. But on a deeper, universal level, these attachments and attractions are symbolic of elements to be found in all men, and all men will find that their ease of heart will come from within themselves if it comes at all.<sup>95</sup>

Though he yearns for eroticism, as Opdahl remarks, "he rebukes himself for the 'feminine game'".<sup>96</sup> Herzog's mind is divided and cannot settle down for anything determinate. He is plagued by such question as "whether justice on this earth can or cannot be general, social, but must originate within each heart",<sup>97</sup> whether self is unique, whether intellection or intuition is relevant for the individual and whether the physical world can be transcended. He quotes Tolstoy and Hegel in the same breath, criticizes T.E. Hulme and is split" between the

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95 Robert, R. Dutton, Saul Bellow, Twayne Publishers Boston, 1982, pp. 127-28.

96 Opdahl, p. 150.

97 Herzog, p. 219.

passive and active",<sup>98</sup> between impulse and reason, violence and chaos, technological impersonality and artistic subjectivity. He dangles between multiple, contradicting and conflicting pulls and is not able to reach calm and harmony of spirit.

Herzog's quest for self reaches its climactic point when he dashes to Chicago to protect his daughter June from Gersbach and Madeleine with the intention of killing the couple. He goes to <sup>the</sup> window and looks at a tender scene: Gersbach is affectionately bathing his daughter and she delighting in it. The scene "goes far to dispel his mistaken pretensions of self and his misinformed idea of his relation to others".<sup>99</sup> Herzog perceives:

The human soul is an amphibian, and I  
have touched its sides. Amphibian! It  
lives in more elements than I will ever  
know; and I assume that in those remote  
stars matter is in the making which will  
create stranger beings yet. I seem to

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98 Opdahl, p. 145.

99 Dutton, p. 129.



think because June looks like a Herzog, she is nearer to me than to them. But how is she near to me if I have no share in her life? Those two grotesque love-actors have it all. And I apparently believe that if the child does not have a life resembling mine, educated according to the Herzog standards of "heart", and all the rest of it, she will fail to become a human being. This is sheer irrationality, and yet some part of my mind takes it as self-evident. But what in fact can she learn from them? From Gersbach, when he looks so sugary, repulsive, poisonous, not an individual but a fragment, a piece broken off from the mob. To shoot him! - an absurd thought. As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buff<sup>o</sup>on to a little child, his intended violence turned into theater, into something ludicrous. He was not ready to make such a complete fool of himself. Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was "broken". How could it be broken by such a pair? Linger in the

alley awhile, he congratulated himself on his luck. His breath came back to him; and how good it felt to breathe! It was worth the trip.<sup>100</sup>

He concludes:

.... But I am, I am, and you can't teach old dogs. Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability. Not organization, or courage as with other people. It's tough, but that's how it is. On these terms I, too - even I! - apprehend certain things.<sup>101</sup>

He has also realized certain universal truths:

Finally, Pulver, to live in an inspired condition, to know truth, to be free, to love another, to consummate existence, to abide with death in clarity of consciousness - without which, racing and conniving to evade death, the spirit holds

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100 Herzog, pp. 257-58.

101 Herzog, p. 330.

its breath and hopes to be immortal  
because it does not live - is no longer  
a rarefied project.<sup>102</sup>

Sammler is an advance on Herzog. His soul is still "conflicted" and divided. On the one hand he is revolted by criminality, sexuality, violence and the tendency to explain everything, on the other he finds that he himself is a part of all that he revolts at. He is drawn to the black pick-pocket though he reports his crime to the police, he listens to the stories of Angela, Bruch and others whom he dislikes and who indulge in sexual perversities, he is shocked at the anarchic and violent ways of his society but does not cut himself off from others. He thinks:

that horror, crime, murder, did vivify  
all the phenomena, the most ordinary  
details of experience. In evil as in  
art there was illumination.<sup>103</sup>

Dutton rightly points out:

Mr. Sammler is not a recluse. Quite

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102 Herzog, p. 165.

103 Herzog, p. 11.

the opposite. He has friends who continually seek him out for his wit, conversation, and counsel, and who confess their lives to him, almost beyond his patience. If it is not his friends, then occasions, events, or facts confront him and demand his attention.<sup>104</sup>

Clayton states that Sammler is "in his own way at least as mad as Herzog" but his "madness is the obverse of Herzog's frenzy of self hood".<sup>105</sup> The reason for his madness is the "horror at the excesses of individual freedom, of licentiousness and aggression on behalf of the ego".<sup>106</sup> Herzog is not mad nor is Sammler but the latter more than the former discovers the human side of what he dislikes most in contemporary American culture, discovers that it is a part of his own psyche:

But wait - Sammler (thought) cautioning himself. Even this madness is also to a considerable extent a matter of performance, of enactment. Underneath there persists, powerfully too, a thick sense of

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104 Dutton, p. 135.

105 Clayton, p. 240.

106 Clayton, p. 240.

what is normal for human life.<sup>107</sup>

Clayton thinks that Sammler has no interest in this planet and is trying to escape it. He remarks:

But what else is Sammler himself trying to do? His flight from this planet is a mirror of the flight of those he condemns. As Bellow knows, Sammler, too, is guilty of a lack of humanity, of a rejection of the human contract.<sup>108</sup>

He does not withdraw from his earthly planet as some critics argue, nor does he withdraw from his spiritual planet, his troubled and torn self. What he tries to do is to disengage himself, to gain a distance so that he might be able to peep into the deeper mysteries of the self, mysteries which can be only felt and not discussed and explained. His goal is disinterestedness and not uninterestedness:

The best, I have found, is to be disinterested. Not as misanthropes dissociate themselves, by judging. But by not judging. By willing as God wills.<sup>109</sup>

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107 Mr Sammler's Planet, p. 118.

108 Clayton, p. 244.

109 Mr Sammler's Planet, p. 189.

The earth is full of tensions and troubles but Sammler is able to achieve what he calls "farewell detachment". He, however, refuses to leave the earth. When Wallace asks if he would like to go to the moon, he answers:

To the moon? But I don't even want to go to Europe, and .... Besides, if I had my choice, I'd prefer the ocean bottom. In Dr. Piccard's bathysphere. I seem to be a depth man rather than a height man. I do not personally care for the illimitable. The ocean, however, deep, has a top and bottom, where as there is no sky ceiling.<sup>110</sup>

Sammler does not consider the moon trip and the life on the moon as "the way to get out of spatial-temporal prison".<sup>111</sup> He wants to achieve the infinite not by going to the moon but through a transcendence in life. As Pifer says, Bellow in Sammler "traces the movement of a soul not turning away from reality but engaged with it, articulating what it knows".<sup>112</sup>

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110 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 147.

111 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 44.

112 Ellen Pifer, Saul Bellow: Against the Grain, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991, p. 24.

Charlie Citrine of Humboldt's Gift is another introspective hero. Like Herzog he spends much time in reminiscing and musing lying on a couch, and his inner explorations lead to the shattering of his belief in the outward appearances:

I rejected the plastered idols of the Appearances. These idols I had been trained, along with everybody else, to see, and I was tired of their tyranny. I even thought, the painted veil isn't what it used to be. The down thing is wearing out .... I was thinking of the power of collective abstractions, and so forth. We crave more than ever the radiant vividness of boundless love, and more and more the barren idols thwart this. A world of categories devoid of spirit waits for life to return.<sup>113</sup>

Citrine like Henderson and Herzog is undergoing a crisis in his life. He has "bungled the whole money thing",<sup>114</sup> spoiled his previous relationships and got stuck in an apparently never ending divorce suit with his wife Denise

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113 Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift, Viking Press, 1975, pp. 16-17 (All subsequent citations from this novel refer to this text).

114 Humboldt's Gift, p. 50.

and over and above lost touch with his "inmost being".<sup>115</sup>  
 His desertion of and quarrel with Humboldt occurred in  
 the past but it still haunts him:

Under the circumstances (and it should  
 now be clearer what I mean by circum-  
 stances: Renato, Denise, children, courts,  
 lawyers, wall Street, sleep, death, meta-  
 physics, Karma, the presence of the uni-  
 verse in us, our being present in the  
 universe itself) I had not paused to  
 think about Humboldt, a precious friend  
 hid in death's dateless night, a comrade  
 from a former existence (almost) well-  
 beloved but dead.<sup>116</sup>

McConnell remarks:

The country is proud of its dead poets....  
 Orpheus moved stones and trees. But a  
 poet can't perform a hysterectomy or send  
 a vehicle out of the solar system. Mira-  
 cle and power no longer belong to him. So  
 poets are loved, but loved because they

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115 Humboldt's Gift, p. 48.

116 Humboldt's Gift, p. 110.



just can't make it here.<sup>117</sup>

Now it is at this time of his life "when Humboldt acted from the grave ... and made a basic change" in his life.

In spite of our big fight and fifteen years of estrangement he left me something in his will. I came into a legacy.<sup>118</sup>

Citrine seeks to discover a "personal connection with the external world"<sup>119</sup> to awaken his soul. Setting aside the objections of everyone he seeks guidance in the writings of "the famous but misunderstood Dr. Rudolf Steiner" and performs his spiritual exercises. According to Ellen Pifer:

It is hunger for news of the soul that impels Citrine to study Steiner; and it is as an aspect of Citrine's internal dilemma or conflict - between the mind's knowledge and the soul's understanding that the discussions of Steiner in

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117 McConnell, p. 49.

118 Humboldt's Gift, p. 6.

119 Humboldt's Gift, p. 202.

Humboldt's Gift should primarily be regarded.<sup>120</sup>

But Citrine's experiences of persons and things, especially his relationship with his women, Cantabile, his brother Glick, Richard Damwald and others,<sup>also drive him towards himself</sup> Critics have specially objected to the relationship between Citrine and Cantabile but their objections do not hold good. As Ellen Pifer points out:

By entangling Citrine in bizarre relationships with members of the demi-monde and in confrontations with lawyers and the police, Cantabile actually serves as a catalyst for certain fundamental revelations on Citrine's part. "Pale and crazy", pushy and persistent, Cantabile crashes into the intellectual's quiet domain like a "demon, an agent of distraction".<sup>121</sup>

Citrine wonders:

And when, I wondered, would I rise at

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<sup>120</sup> Pifer, p. 135.

<sup>121</sup> Pifer, p. 132.

last above all this stuff, the accidental, the merely phenomenal, the wastefully and randomly human, and he fit to enter higher worlds?<sup>122</sup>

Bellow would not like to provide a definite answer to this but as Ellen Pifer writes:

By unsettling the "collective abstractions" of contemporary "head culture", literally standing them on their head, Citrine resolves to find a "personal connection" to creation. To the possibility of discovering such connection the novel itself bears witness.<sup>123</sup>

If Citrine is motivated by the "hunger for news of the soul" so is Albert Corde, "more directly than any previous Bellow protagonist, the soul's connection to creation".<sup>124</sup> Malcolm Bradbury calls him:

a new hero, a new man of feeling, who like Sammler and Citrine, knows his

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122 Humboldt's Gift, p. 291.

123 Pifer, p. 151.

124 Pifer, p. 176.

own complicity, is in some ways shamed by his own self-questioning, yet who still has some need to encounter his own fundamental human nature, to discover the place of the true soul which feels.<sup>125</sup>

The novel has been called a tale of two cities, Bucharest and Chicago, which "interlock into/versions of the modern world, each generating dismay",<sup>126</sup> but what engages readers most "is Corde's ongoing struggle to evaluate internally his self, and that way in which that self responds to the other".<sup>127</sup> Of those who help Corde to realize his inner vision, Valeria, Minna and Dewey Spangler occupy central place in the novel. Valeria is his mother-in-law whom he with his wife Minna visits in Bucharest while she is on her deathbed. He visits her shortly before her death in the hospital. Hooked up to various machines in the intensive care unit, she appears all but dead. Corde whispers to her his "essential message", "I also love you

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125 Bradbury, p. 93.

126 Bradbury, p. 94.

127 Matthew C. Roudane, "Cri de Coeur: The Inner Reality of Saul Bellow's The Deans December", Studies in the Humanities 11, no. 2 (December 1984), pp. 5-17.

Valeria".<sup>128</sup> This makes an unexpected effect on her. Her face was taken by a spasm. The monitors jumped simultaneously. All the numbers began to tumble and whirl".<sup>129</sup> Corde discovers his abiding connection to Valeria. He understands "that his love for Valeria is really a mystery emanating from an invisible source - that 'something', that core of being to which we assign names (the Latin cor, for example) but which we cannot locate".<sup>130</sup>

According to Matthew C. Roudane "Corde's relationship with Valeria is thematically central to the novel",<sup>131</sup> but so is his relationship with Minna. There are subtle tensions inbuilt between them. Corde expects her to be involved in his problem and to share his priorities. But as Ada Aharoni points out:

Minna ... refuses to inhabit the "background" of her husband's "foreground", does not even realize that this is what he expects of her. She is so engrossed in her work and career that it

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128 The Dean's December, p. 128.

129 The Dean's December, p. 128.

130 Pifer, p. 173.

131 Roudane, pp. 5-17.

does not dawn on her that he could make such demands.<sup>132</sup>

In fact Nina confesses that she does not understand her husband fully. "You turned out to be a much more emotional and strange person than I even expected".<sup>133</sup> The marriage, however, does not fail. The Cordes experience the restoration of their spiritual vitality when they come back to the States:

On the plane when he held his wife's thin hand, she was too ill and bitter to be aware of his touch; she shut him out. But he was minutely aware of things, and the source of his awareness was in his equilibrium, a very extensive kind of composure. Not that this composure didn't have tight areas, crawl spaces, narrow and painful corners where longtime miseries rankled and to which there was not easy access,

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132 Aheroni, pp. 99-112.

133 The Dean's December, p. 259.

but this rankling - sometimes an electric prickling in a circle around his heart - couldn't be separated from his sense of improvement, of coming into his own.<sup>134</sup>

Dewey Spangler, the boyhood friend of the Dean betrays his trust. Dewey considers him to be his rival. He seeks him out in Bucharest though he had never looked him up in Chicago. In his innocent trust the Dean lays bare his heart on various matters but Dewey uses his views and experiences for a spicy article. In spite of all this Cordo is able to see the inside of Dewey's soul:

He saw now that Spangler was downslanted in spirit. The slight wave of his hair, which had always had an upward tendency, apparently had reversed itself. And he used dye, that was perfectly plain. But this was a mere observation and no judgment. Let him touch up his hair. Seeing him so actual, vanities were dissipated, you were in no position to judge, and

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134 The Dean's December, pp. 282-83.

there was no need for judging. Spangler's rays were turned downwards, and his look openly confessed it. He had been a kook, but certainly no coward. Maybe on this death day Corde was receiving secret guidance in seeing life. Perhaps at this very moment the flames were finishing Valeric, and therefore it was especially important to think what a human being really was.<sup>135</sup>

It is through such vivid forms of attachment that Corde discovers the vital connection of the soul to the world. Pifer rightly remarks:

Corde's revelation is not confined to the level of abstract "discourse", however. At the end of the novel, Bellow articulates his character's felt connection to the universe, his bond with all creation; and he does so by creating verbal "pictures" traced in the very language of attachment that Corde has been seeking.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> The Dean's December, p. 245.

<sup>136</sup> Pifer, p. 176.



## III

Each of Saul Bellow's hero is engaged in the quest for the self and each comes to a certain realization and then hands over the quest to the other as if he were a participant in a relay race. From Joseph to Albert Corde there is a long stretch and has to be covered in stages. The problems of the self are many, external as well as internal, physical as well as metaphysical, historical as well as transcendental. The question arises what is the real nature of the self which the protagonists of Bellow constantly pursue. Is it ever in a flux and contingent upon external reality or is it something inner and the core of which remains unchangeable? Let us see how Bellow conceives the true self or "primordial nature" to be.

Freud and his followers have left a deep impact on modern thought. Bellow also shows a great admiration for Freud. In fact almost every hero of his knows Freud. Freud has thought of the self in terms of the unconscious 'id' and 'ego'. According to him the ego appears to be

autonomous and unitary but it really is "continued inward, without any sharp delimitation into an unconscious mental entity which we designate as 'id' and for which it serves as a facade".<sup>137</sup> Bellow does not fully agree with Freud with regard to the unconscious:

Is it possible that what we don't know has a metaphysical character and not a Freudian, naturalistic character? I think that the unconscious is a concept that begs the question and simply returns us to our ignorance with an arrogant attitude of confidence, and that is why I am against it.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly Bellow also does not subscribe to the primacy of Oedipus Complex. An American doctor wrote to Freud after reading his The future of an Illusion that as a medical student he had lost his faith in God when he saw the body of a "very beautiful old woman" brought into the

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<sup>137</sup> Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), p.13.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Boyers, et al., "Literature and Culture: An Interview with Saul Bellow", Salmagundi 30 (Summer 1975), p. 19.

dissecting room. Freud responded by saying that the American doctor saw his own mother in the body of the cadaver. Bellow reacts sharply against this kind of attitude:

At this moment I experienced a violent reaction against Freud. Was it not possible to experience beauty or pity without thinking of your mother, or without the Oedipus Complex?<sup>139</sup>

Bellow does not approve of "the pleasure principle" of Freud who asserts: "one feels inclined to say the intention that men should be happy is not included in the plan of 'creation'".<sup>140</sup> Herzog speaks for the novelist when he says:

I subscribed at one time to the theory that it was pleasure and pleasure only that gave one the strength to be moral, that pleasure was fundamentally a question of health, and that the only possible source of goodness and happiness

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Boyers, p. 18.

<sup>140</sup> Freud, p. 24.

was instinctual gratification. I no longer believe this to be true.<sup>141</sup>

Freud's master trope is "the understanding of normal character through the neurotic character, of health through sickness",<sup>142</sup> and he considers ethics as "therapeutic" activity of the super ego. Bellow is quite skeptical of such formulations. Charlie Citrine expressing his dislike of Kieff's book The triumph of the Therapeutic says:

It says that psychotherapist may become the new spiritual leaders of mankind. A disaster Goethe was further afraid the modern world might turn into a hospital. Every citizen unwell.<sup>143</sup>

Bellow rejects Freud in these fundamental concepts and yet in many he appears to be indebted to him. He frequently uses psycho-analytic terminology and considers childhood experience of primary importance for self-definition. Many protagonists of Bellow lend themselves to psycho-analysis. In fact on various occasions "we

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141 As cited by Daniel Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud", Studies in the Literary Imagination 17, no.2 (1984), pp.59-80.

142 Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud", pp. 59-80.

143 Humboldt's Gift, p. 175.

seem to be eaves-dropping on an analytic session".<sup>144</sup> It is because of this that several critics have tried to interpret various Bellow characters in terms of Freudian thought. J.J. Clayton admits in his preface to the second edition of his book, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, of his "developing interest in seeing Bellow with a psycho-analytic lens".<sup>145</sup>

Malcolm Bradbury, Brigitte Scheer-Schazler, Dutton and others are also inclined to take this line. Jonathan Wilson may be considered to be representative of these critics:

For despite Bellow's side<sup>s</sup>wipe's at Freud (most forcefully combined in his play The last Analysis) our assessment and understanding of Bellow's central characters seems enhanced when we approach them as "living" examples of Freud's theories.<sup>146</sup>

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144 Daniel Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud", pp. 59-80.

145 Clayton, Preface.

146 Wilson, p. 14.

Freud's explanations and concepts may be true as far as one part of human psyche is concerned. He, however, has no explanation for spiritual yearnings in man, yearnings for transcendence and mystical experience, or in a word for non-analyzable human soul. Bellow's protagonists are not mere ids or libidos; they have intimations of immortality, they experience the mystery of being and are in the quest of human soul.

The novelist's pursuits of human soul can be seen in the central consciousness of each of his novel. In his earlier heroes the desire of the spirit for connection to creation, for transcending physical world and death and for intuitive religious experience is just incipient. In the later heroes especially Herzog, Sammler, Citrine and Corde it is palpably manifest. Daniel Fuchs sums up Bellow's response to Freud very appropriately in the following words:

Though Herzog tells Dr. Freud that he is "immersed in your collected Papers" (18.18), though snatches of Freudian language appear in many places in Bellow, usually seriously (sometimes comically, e.g., Hoberly's unrequited love is now

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called "hysterical dependency" (II, 180), though Bellow recognizes the reality of an unconscious, of repression, of the psychological importance of childhood, of filial ambivalence, of behavior conceived as conflict, nevertheless he can accept Freudianism as at best a partial explanation.<sup>147</sup>

Bellow is deeply immersed in the writings of existentialist philosophers and his novels are interspersed with references to Sartre, Camus, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and others. Ondaatje remarks on the views of Sartre on the nature of self:

Sartre gives an extreme statement of the claims of the world upon the self when he argues that identity is found exclusively in Man's appearance in the world, or in those conditioning factors he calls "facticity". Because we cannot conceive of a self in pure form, separate from the temporal facts of environment and identity, Sartre denies

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<sup>147</sup> Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud", pp. 59-80.

that it exists. Man has no essential self created by God and imbued with purpose, and thus he must create himself by action within the historical world.<sup>148</sup>

It appears that Bellow adopts the existentialist line in the portrayal of his protagonists. To many critics they seem to be alienated, victimised, angst-ridden and living in an absurd world of contingencies. In reality it is not so. Alienation, anxiety disillumment are aspects of many of Bellow's heroes as they are of average human beings in the world of today. They, however, are not their total personality and do not indicate their existential belief. Saul Bellow has more to quarrel than to agree with existentialism. Herzog disdains

the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation,  
the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about  
Inauthenticity and Forlornness.<sup>149</sup>

He rejects its nihilism. In the words of Herzog the Americans feel:

Romantic defeat, Despair with the big D  
 and the Existential stuff, so that they

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148 Opdahl, pp. 23-24.

149 Herzog, p. 75.



can give the children nothing but apologies and placate them for exposing them to nothing. I mean Nothing, which is neither a category in logic nor a psychological concept but simply a mental and spiritual disintegration from which you're expected to start all over again without illusions or consolations, the Hegelian alienated self in its Unhappy Consciousness. No, all that is deadend Romanticism, and I've always gotten out of it by being a Jew (B.18.18.260).<sup>150</sup>

He does not agree with Heidegger's view about the fall into the quotidian and the rejection of ordinary life in the confrontation with death.

... confronting one's death breaks the hold of banality and inauthenticity which the quotidian imposes.<sup>151</sup>

Bellow's greatest disagreement with existentialism is on

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150 As cited by Fuchs, "Vision and Revision", p. 157.

151 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 159.

the concept of self. According to William Barrett Sartre's position is "If we exist our facticity then we are, it, and it makes up the total essence of what we are".<sup>152</sup> He goes on to say, "the self, indeed is in Sartre's treatment, as in Buddhism, a bubble, and a bubble has nothing at its centre".<sup>153</sup> Clayton remarks:

To be "human" is, throughout Bellow's fiction, terrifying. And so his heroes turn themselves into ideal images in order to protect themselves. At the same time they turn the world into one in which they can live safely. This double creation of a self and of a world is a constant theme in Bellow.<sup>154</sup>

The truth is that Bellow's heroes do not turn themselves into ideal images. They are cast into a certain mould and they try to break out of it. Each of Bellow heroes undergoes some kind of transformation be it Joseph, Asa,

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152 William Barrett, Irrational Man, (New York, 1962), p. 109.

153 Barrett, p. 247.

154 Clayton, p. 77.

Herzog or Corde. They negate the views of Sartre. Their sole endeavour is to discover what is at the centre of an individual's life and though they do not claim for any finality, they discover an essence which has close affinities with <sup>"primordial being"</sup> ~~human-soul~~, which in fact is the human soul. Bellow is rather in agreement with Kierkegaard who affirms the soul rather than Sartre who denies it.

Romanticism had a great impact on the moulding of the novelist's sensibility. Of course, Bellow does not support the cult of ego and the concept of the uniqueness of the self. As Clayton remarks, "It is the error of becoming more than human and so becoming less-than-human".<sup>155</sup> Herzog is engaged in a work,

supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the self; revising the old Western, Faustian ideology; investigating the social meaning of nothingness.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Clayton, p. 81.

<sup>156</sup> Herzog, p. 39.

It is the concept of the uniqueness of the self which puts man on the wrong path of high ambitions and self-centredness resulting in frustrations and paranoia. So Bellow attacks "the Rousseauistic aggrandizement of the powers of the individual, the extremist romantic impulse".<sup>157</sup> Bradbury remarks:

... the streets of New York are filled with mad self mythologizers, rampant with the assertion of self.<sup>158</sup>

It, however, does not mean that he has no affinity with other English romantics. Allan Chavkin rightly observes:

Critics have found it difficult to delineate the complex sensibility at the core of his work. A key to this sensibility can be found, however, in his repudiation of what he considers to be "the Wasteland outlook" of modernism and in his allegiance to the older tradition of early nine-

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157 Gloria L. Cronin, "Henderson the Rain King: A Parodic Expose of the Modern Novel", Saul Bellow in the 1980s, p. 196.

158 Bradbury, p. 81.

teenth century English romanticism.<sup>159</sup>

In his works, especially the later ones, Bellow affirms the worth of the ordinary individual and his everyday life. He has no sympathy for what he calls the "myth of diminished man". According to him, modern Western realism has made "the ordinary man extraordinarily limited, weak, sick, paltry, subject to devouring illusion".<sup>160</sup>

What he intends to do is to discover "the extraordinary in the ordinary",<sup>161</sup> through the power of imagination. In an article "A World too Much With Us" he writes that the task of imagination has become much more difficult but all the more necessary today. He attacks the predominating attitude of contemporary society which, while greatly esteeming action - and technical and scientific accomplishment, "takes little stock in the imagination or in individual talent". Irvin Stock associates Bellow's romanticism with the earth-bound romanticism of Wordsworth which is just the opposite of visionary or apocalyptic romanticism. He writes:

Bellow has a gift, reminiscent of Wordsworth, for evoking in his very sentence

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159 Chavkin, pp. 7-18.

160 Saul Bellow, "A Comment on Form and Despair", Location 1 (Summer 1964), p. 12.

161 Joseph Epstein, "A talk with Saul Bellow", New York Times Book Review, 5 (December 1976), p. 93

rhythms, as well as in his words, the experience of thought, the drama of its emergence out of the life of the whole man.<sup>162</sup>

Today man lives in a world of distractions, frustrations and "the engulfing mechanisms of power and mass".<sup>163</sup> He is torn by several biological, historical and economic drives and is ridden by anxiety, guilt, fixations, tensions, boredom and fear of death. He usually identifies his self with one of the prevalent modern theories and seldom tests if the theory is true. He has dissociated his thought from feeling and feels crushed by facts and statistics. He seldom tries to peep into his true self and keeps drifting aimlessly in an apparently meaningless world. The Bellow hero tries to ask fundamental questions about reality and tries to discover if there is anything stable or "a core of the eternal" <sup>which can be an everfixed mark, while</sup> ~~who is exposed to~~ various kinds of strong winds from all sides. The impulse seems to be, "To take with one, whether down into the depths or out into space and time, something dear and to

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162 Irvin Stock, "Man in Culture", Commentary (May 1970), p. 93.

163 Bradbury, p. 32.

preserve it".<sup>164</sup> Obviously a person "has something" in him which he feels it important to continue. Something that deserves to go on".<sup>165</sup> This "something dear", something which "deserves to go on" can be nothing else but "the soul or true self". Bellow himself asserts the importance of soul in his foreward to Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind:

The independence of this consciousness, which has the strength to be immune to the noise of history and the distractions of our immediate surroundings, is what the life struggle is all about..The soul has to find and hold its ground against hostile forces, sometimes embodied in ideas which frequently deny its very existence and which indeed often seem to be trying to annul it altogether.<sup>166</sup>

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164 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 110.

165 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 189.

166 Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 16-17.

The true self is the essential self. It "is given rather than invented"<sup>167</sup> and is beyond all sorts of strivings. Henderson means this true self when he says to Dahfu,

I've just got to stop Becoming. Jesus  
Christ, when am I going to be?<sup>168</sup>

The soul is to be differentiated from the mind. According to the French philosopher Etienne Gilson, the soul has been usually considered to be "a spiritual principle substantially united to a body" and mind, <sup>but</sup> after Descartes, "a thinking substance distinct from, and exclusive of the body"<sup>169</sup> Joseph, the hero of Bellow's first novel, withdraws from life like a religious recluse to discover if "I claim the right to preserve myself in this flood of death that has carried off so many like".<sup>170</sup> Though the word that he uses for this "self" is "mind". What he has in mind is "soul". In the words of Opdahl:

167 Opdahl, p. 24.

168 Henderson the Rain King, p. 191.

169 Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Scribner's, 1937), p. 173.

170 Dangling Man, p. 138.



Painfully aware of his external helplessness, Joseph continually returns to his need for a self which exists in its own right, whatever its dependence on the world, a self which is essential rather than contingent.<sup>171</sup>

Albert Corde, the protagonist of The Dean's December too seeks the soul which can apprehend beyond appearances in historical time. That he has been able to do so is apparent from his experience atop the elevator of the telescope on Mount Palomar.

Through these distortions you saw objects, forms, partial realities. The rest was to be felt. And it wasn't only that you felt, but that you were drawn to feel and to penetrate further, as if you were being informed that what was spread over you had to do with your existence, down to the very bloody and the crystal forms inside your bones. Rocks, trees, animals, men and women, these also drew you to penetrate further, under the

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<sup>171</sup> Opdahl, p. 43.

distortions (comparable to the atmospheric ones, shadows within shadows), to find their real being with your own. This was the sense in which you were drawn.<sup>172</sup>

The true self is a seeker of reality, reality about human existence and reality about the world. The Cartesian mind, which is detached from the body, tries to prove (or disprove) a reality which according to Gilson cannot be proved "not because it is not true, but on the contrary, because it is evident ... to a soul, not to a mind".<sup>173</sup> All Bellow's heroes are engaged in the exploration of reality. There are some who withdraw from the world and try to discover it in their inner self like Joseph, Leventhal and Wilhelm and there are others like Augie and Henderson who externalize their quest. The later heroes of Bellow like Herzog, Sammler, Citrine and Corde are meditative but they seldom decline to respond to the external stimuli of the world. They are able to experience what Augie March calls "the mystical great things of life"<sup>174</sup> much better than others.

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172 The Dean's December, p. 311.

173 Gilson, p. 184.

174 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 452.

The human soul has certain latent characteristics. It has intimations of immortality and has the capacity to overcome the existential anxiety over death. What makes man ill-equipped to handle the phenomenon of death are abstract ideas, alienation from others, surrender to unreality and false selfhood. Joseph realizes this fact. According to him, "Death is the abolition of choice. The more choice is limited, the closer we are to death".<sup>175</sup> Those who enslave themselves to their ideal, limit their choice and undergo a living death. Similarly, John Pearl complains of South Brooklyn:

We moved here to save money, but I'm afraid we'd better start saving ourselves and move out again. It's the treelessness, as much as anything that hurts me. The unnatural, too human deadness.<sup>176</sup>

Keith Opdahl rightly comments:

The deadness of the city is too- human because it represents our society's

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175 Dangling Man, p. 122.

176 Dangling Man, p. 127.

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attempt to avoid death by embracing stone and metal. The ideologist who forms Joseph's society invests his whole life - his freedom, energy and happiness - in either an idea, which is abstract, or an object, which is inorganic.<sup>177</sup>

Miss Lenox in Henderson the Rain King lives in a cottage crowded with accumulated junk of her daily scavenging. She tries to seek a symbolic immortality by living with inanimate and deathless tokens of life and thus defeats herself and suffers a living death. Henderson too seeks "a remedy to the anxiety over death" by denying the body and facts of death. He says, "If this body, if this flesh of mine were only a dream". He seeks immortality through artificiality of existence. He devotes many hours in a damp basement study in the hope of reaching his parent's spirits by playing the violin. He tells us, "It so happens that I have never been able to convince myself the dead are utterly dead".<sup>178</sup> Opdahl rightly remarks:

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<sup>177</sup> Opdahl, p. 34.

<sup>178</sup> Henderson the Rain King, p. 30.

Each of Bellow's heroes finds the climax of his story - and a sense of great release - in a confrontation with death. Joseph's final walk in the alley is associated with the ancient figure of his dreams, and his subsequent request for induction - itself a confrontation of death - brings relief. Leventhal awakes to find his life in danger, Allbee about to die, and, at the end of their struggle, a sense of completion. Augie too undergoes such an experience in his fight with Basteshaw in the lifeboat and his violent breakup with Thea, Wilhelm breaks down before a corpse and Henderson witnesses Dahfu's death. In each case the hero vacillates before a threat or ordeal and then confronts the source of that threat in the death scene. In each there is a pattern of resistance, embrace and release - reminiscent of Leventhal's description of the swinging door.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Opdahl, p. 160.

The only way to overcome the fear of death is to acknowledge the deeper spiritual realities of life. In his novels Bellow, to put it in the words of Ihab Hassan, seeks to "convince us that reality or experience of life - call it what we will - is worth all the agonies of human existence without ever needing to be intelligible". Bellow has often emphasized that reality cannot be seized through rationality and that the external reality is not true reality. He even suspects if the physical world is real at all. Joseph feels that "the real world is not here at all and what is at hand is spurious and copied".<sup>180</sup> Herzog believes:

We have ground to hope that a Life is something more than such a cloud of particles, mere facticity. Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the incomprehensible gives any light.<sup>181</sup>

Augie seeks to find the basis of his tenure beyond the

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180 Dangling Man, p. 24.

181 Herzog, p. 266.

social and historical world:

It takes some of us a long time to find out what the price is of our being in nature, and what the facts are about your tenure.<sup>182</sup>

Bellow's heroes try to transcend the physical reality to be able to reach spiritual reality through intuitive experience. The focus in his novels fall on those crucial moments in the life of a hero when he "transcending the immediate pressures of his environment and the limiting conditions of his social matrix, asks himself some fundamental questions about the nature of his humanity".<sup>183</sup>

Bellow's transcendent vision has increasingly become religious. According to Opdahl, "the problem and goal of all of Bellow's heroes is religious transcendence". He calls it "problem" because "their rages derive from balked religious longings" and considers it to be a "goal" because "only transcendence will finally answer the problems they

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182 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 421.

183 Nathan A. Scott, Three American Moralists: Mailer, Bellow, Trilling (Norte Dame, Ind.: University of Norte Dame Press, 1973), p. 105.

face".<sup>184</sup> Though critics like Wilson shy at the use of transcendentalism in the criticism of Bellow's novels, Stephen L. Tanner rightly points out:

Mention of soul, spirit, the mystery of the human person, and knowledge of the heart rather than of the intellect has increased in tandem with pointed criticism of modern psychology, the arrogance and dehumanizing effects of scientific, materialism, the sordid emptiness of merely biological sex, and the soul-damaging consequences of contemporary money and power seeking.<sup>185</sup>

Bellow entertains no skepticism about the significance of the affirmation of the transcendent in the human life. The early heroes may be furtive about revelations of religious kind, however, later Bellow's heroes Herzog, Sammler, Citrine and Corde are much more concerned about the affirmation of religious transcendence than anything else.

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<sup>184</sup> Opdahl, p. 17.

<sup>185</sup> Stephen L. Tanner, "The Religious Vision of More Die of Heartbreak", Saul Bellow in the 1980s, p.283.



Sammler in the concluding lines of the novel suggests that each individual has "an intuitive awareness of transcendent reality".<sup>186</sup> Men may or may not acknowledge but it exists.

For that is the truth of it - that we  
all know God, that we know, that we  
know, we know".<sup>187</sup>

Similarly Citrine distinguishes between the mind's knowledge and the soul's understanding. Like Sammler he is aware of the mystery of life. He observes:

The old philosophy distinguished between knowledge achieved by effort (ratio) and knowledge received (intellectus) by the listening soul that can hear the essence of things and comes to understand the marvellous.<sup>188</sup>

He turns to the study of Rudolf Steiner and his anthropology after he learns about him from Richard Durnwald who

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186 Chavkin, p. 67.

187 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 252.

188 Humboldt's Gift, p. 306.

"had simply been joking about Steiner"<sup>189</sup> during one of their conversations. Steiner, however, is only one of the influences on Saul Bellow's world view. As L.H. Goldman asserts, his novels also reveal his "indebtedness to Jewish philosophers and possibly the influence of their writings on Christian thinkers with whom Bellow is familiar".<sup>190</sup> The essential self in Saul Bellow has another important attribute, imagination. In his article "A World Too Much With Us" Bellow declares, "The imagination I take to be indispensable to truth".<sup>191</sup> One of the things through which man can salve his hurt psyche in the contemporary world is imagination. Humboldt attempted to reconcile the massiveness of the American universe with the Platonic functions of imagination. Charlie Citrine realizes:

Mankind must recover its imaginative powers, recover living thought and real being, no longer accept these insults to its soul, and do it soon.<sup>192</sup>

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189 Humboldt's Gift, p. 109.

190 Goldman, p. 53.

191 Saul Bellow, "A World too Much With Us", Critical Inquiry 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), pp. 1-9.

192 Humboldt's Gift, p. 245.

Citrine is able to retrieve the light which comes from living imagination, the light in which the child's eye enwraps the world, an ineffable part of his being.

I want it to be clear, however, that I speak as a person who had lately received or experienced light. I don't mean "The light". I mean a kind of light-in-the - being, a thing difficult to be precise about, especially in a account like this, where so many cantankerous erroneous silly and delusive objects, actions and phenomena are in the foreground.<sup>193</sup>

Dahfu believes that imagination is active. According to him:

The career of our species is evidence that one imagination after another grows literal. Not dreams. Not mere dreams. I say not mere dreams because they have a way of growing actual .... What Homo

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193 Humboldt's Gift, p. 177.

sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to.<sup>194</sup>

Henderson, of course, does not accept this theory but his spiritual sickness is cured all the same. Herzog sets a lot of store by "inspired condition" which enables us to know truth, to love others and to consummate existence and all this comes from imagination. Dahfu associates good with "inspiration and not conflict".

Bellow does not consider facts to be facts unless they are <sup>imaginatively</sup> ~~unimaginatively~~ perceived:

But the facts, unless the imagination perceives them, are not facts. Perhaps I shouldn't say "perceives" - I should say "passionately takes hold". As an artist does, Mr. Corde, the Dean, passionately takes hold of Chicago and writes his articles like an artist rather than a journalist.<sup>195</sup>

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194 Henderson the Rain King, p. 271.

195 Roudane, p. 273.

By stressing imagination to be a vital aspect of the transcendent self, Bellow restores intuition and emotion to their rightful place in the life of the contemporary man.

## 3

## RESPONSE TO THE SOCIAL REALITY

## I

All of us live in society and most of us do not bother to know what its real nature is as we do not bother to know what the composition of air and water is. An ordinary person has to live in society and he takes it for granted. Not so a thinking person. He feels baffled by social reality and is compelled to probe its real nature because the very survival of the individual depends on it. In fact the true self can neither be interpreted nor defined if it is not embedded in its social context. Bellow himself has been greatly interested in the question of social reality and the response of the self to it. An important fact about his life is that he majored in anthropology at Northwestern and founded a socialist Club there. He has been associated with the Committee on Social thought at the University of Chicago.

Social thinkers have been divided on the question of the relationship between society and the individual. Some of these like Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim consider societies in terms of their social structures. For Marx what is important in a society is class conflict. He dwells on social divisions and economic determinism but not on the conflict of the individual with society. Herbert Spencer is primarily concerned with the evolutionary nature of society. According to Eshleman and Cashion:

He believed that societies evolved from relative homogeneity and simplicity to heterogeneity and complexity. As simple societies progress, they become increasingly complex, and differentiated. Spencer viewed societies not simply as collections of individuals, but as organisms with a life and vitality of their own.<sup>1</sup>

Durkheim holds a different view. He does not agree with

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1 J. Ross Eshleman & Barbara G. Cashion, "Sociology: An Introduction", Little, Brown and Company, 1983, p. 28.

Spencer who thinks that social events are guided by the same rules as those of biology or psychology. According to him social phenomena are social facts which have certain distinctive social characteristics and determinants. These social facts are external to the individual and are capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint. According to another important thinker Max Weber sociology is a study not of social facts and social structures alone but of social actions also, "the external objective behaviours as well as the internalized values, motives, and subjective meanings that individuals attach to their own behaviour and to the behaviour of others".<sup>2</sup> The work of 'Chicago School' is a further and significant advance on Weber. This school includes thinkers like Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead and W.I. Thomas. Mead is the chief advocate of the view that,

humans respond to symbolic and abstract meanings as well as concrete experiences, and that self and society are one and the same in that individuals internalize social values and norms. Humans

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2 Eshleman & Cashion, p. 31.



are both actors and reactors, they are self-stimulating and can produce their own reactions, responses and definitions.<sup>3</sup>

With this background we can explore Bellow's view of society and its interaction with the self. For Bellow society is made of,

people testing to find whether they can eat without tasting, view without suffering, make love without feeling and exist between winning and losing in an even state of potentiality.<sup>4</sup>

It appears to be a body of milling crowds, possessing its own demonic energy and driven by biological and political drives:

And the great, great crowd, the inexhaustible current of millions of every race and kind pouring out, pressing round, of

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3 Eshleman & Cashion, p. 32.

4 Opdahl, p. 83.

every age of every genius, possessors  
of every human secret, antique and  
future, in every face the refinement  
of one particular motive or essence -  
I labor, I spend, I strive, I design,  
I love, I cling, I uphold, I give way,  
I envy, I long, I scorn, I die, I hide,  
I want.<sup>5</sup>

In his crowds Bellow suggests the blind impersonal sweep of life. His protagonists are afraid of being drowned in the sea of humanity and their first response is to withdraw. The society that Bellow delineates is usually of the two cities of America, Chicago and New York but in a sense it represents America and even the world. Bellow's New York and Chicago with their unnatural heat, filthy smells and mad human crowds appear to be similar to the overpopulated Asian cities. This is the image of New York we get from the opening lines of The Victim:

On some nights New York is as hot as  
Bangkok. The whole continent seems

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5 Seize the Day, p. 115.

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to have moved from its place and slid  
nearer the equator, the bitter grey  
Atlantic to have become green and tropical,  
and the people, thronging the  
streets, barbaric fellahin among the  
stupendous monuments of their mystery,  
the lights of which, a dozing profusion,  
climb upward endlessly into the heat of  
the sky.<sup>6</sup>

The inhumanity of society is best expressed by the oft-quoted lines of The Victim:

The notion brushed Leventhal's mind that  
the light over them and over the water  
was akin to the yellow revealed in the  
slit of the eye of a wild animal, say  
a lion, something inhuman that didn't care  
about anything human and yet was implanted  
in every human being too, one speck of it,  
and formed a part of him that responded  
to the heat and the glare, exhausting as

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6 The Victim, p. 9.

these were, or even to freezing, salty things, harsh things all things difficult to stand.<sup>7</sup>

The society which dominates the Bellow world is incapable of looking at reality because it is overwhelmed by theories, ideologies, abstractions and classifications. Bellow has a specific dislike for those who try to fit reality into their own schemes and plans. His outlook in this respect is analogous to that of social theorists like Raymond Aron and Edward Shils. Ideology has been defined by Shils with strict constructionist precision. Fuchs explains Shil's view of ideology in the following words:

Ideology is a highly systematized pattern of belief integrated around a few preeminent values - salvation, equality, ethnic purity. Political coherence overrides every other consideration, with supreme significance going to one group or class - the nation, the ethnic folk, the proletariat, the party leaders. It

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7 The Victim, p. 47.

has a Manichean cast, positing uncompromisable distinctions between good and evil, sacred and profane, left and right, we and they; the source of evil is a foreign power, an ethnic group, or a class (e.g. bourgeois).<sup>8</sup>

Bellow does not mince words about ideology. In an untitled draft for a lecture on the novel included in his unpublished Notebooks C.2.7, he writes:

Ideology is crippling to attention. It has no finite interests but makes a whole sale distribution of innumerable human facts. Its historical or biological schemes dispose of human beings by classification.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bellow, though ideologies abolish confusion, it has no interest in "the miracle of being".<sup>10</sup> It is

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8 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 35.

9 As cited by Fuchs, Vision and Revision, pp. 36-37.

10 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 37.

because of this that in all his novels Bellows attacks 'ideal constructions' and 'reality teachers'. Ideal constructions are nothing but ideologies and theories, an attempt to subvert the mystery of mankind and the inexhaustibility of human life. According to Clayton:

An ideal construction is, then, a created self and a created reality. Thus an ideal constructor can see things as a military man or behavioristic psychologist or clown or Communist Party member.<sup>11</sup>

Saul Bellow's society teems with such persons. Every one has a bee in his bonnet. In Dangling Man Joseph's brother sees himself a budding tycoon and for him the world is nothing but money. Jimmy Burns sees Joseph not as a person but as a contemptible petty bourgeois renegade" and thinks that he can cut him dead. The Machiavellians like Einhorn, Grandma Lausch and Hymie Bateshaw in The Adventures of Augie March are ideal constructors. So are Tamkin, Dahfu and scores of others thickly populating the novels of Bellow from first to last.

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11 Clayton, p. 78.

Bellow looks at society through the eyes of his protagonist but its reality, its solidity and its visibility is never lost on the readers. It is steeped in violence, chaos and anxiety. War, poverty, the Mammon worship the break down of family ties, sexual violence and things like that may loom large on the horizon of the Bellow novels but Bellow seldom takes up any specific social problem in his novels. Howard Harper calls Joseph "a moral casualty of the war"<sup>12</sup> but there is not much war in the novel, which in reality is a mediation on the human condition. Similarly The Victim deals with the times of the Depression but the thrust of the focus in the novel is on the question of responsibility. The problems of Tommy Wilhelm and Augie are the problems of growing into adulthood, the problems of the roles of fathers but again the central theme in the novel becomes either that of the connection with society or freedom. Many of Herzog's troubles are due to the failure of his marital life but Bellow hardly enquires into the issue of man and woman relationship. The same can be said about

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12 Howard M. Harper, "Saul Bellow - The Heart's Ultimate Need", Desperate Faith, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1967, p. 64.

other remaining novels. Though Bellow may adhere to the tradition of social realism and create what David L. Stevenson calls "the large, usable social images of American life",<sup>13</sup> his thematic focus usually narrows down on the issues which are related to the problem of the suffering and its endeavour to seek communion with society.

So the novelist as well his protagonist has to face the problem of evil. The theme of evil and the suffering it causes has occupied the imagination of all the great creative writers. Many thinkers believe in the Manichaeian conception of evil. Manichaeism is a dualistic philosophy and sees the world, especially human life, as a struggle between totally independent principles of good and evil, light and darkness, God and matter and so on. There are others who think that 'life is a web of mingled yarn good and ill together' and they cannot be separated from each other. For Marxists the source of human suffering is economic inequality. There are others who trace the origin of evil

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13 David L. Stevenson, "Styron and the Fiction of the Fifties", Critique, 3 (Summer 1960), p. 56.



to biological or historical determinism. In Christianity Original Sin has been considered the cause of human sinfulness and his suffering. According to Hinduism it is attachment which gives rise to evil and suffering. The Jews do not believe in Original Sin and appear to follow Pelagianism which says that man of his own free will and without the intervention of God's grace can live sinless and attain eternal life. Arthur A. Cohen in his book The Myth of Judeo-Christian Tradition remarks about the Pelagian quality of Jewish belief. He writes that for the Jew,

Everything good and everything evil is  
done by man and not born with man....  
The Jew is Pelagian since the world,  
according to his lights, has neither  
properly fallen nor has been properly  
redeemed.<sup>14</sup>

Evil in Bellows novel is both physical and metaphysical, social and personal. It is apparent in the ruthlessness

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur A. Cohen, The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition (New York: Schocken 1971), p. 77.

of "the life force" which occupies "each of us in turn in its progress towards its own fulfillment, trampling on our individual humanity, using us for its own ends like mere dinosaurs or bees".<sup>15</sup> It is embodied in the destructiveness, inhumanity and self-obsession of society. It emanates from hostile environment and biological and political determinism. It is "this mighty free running terror and wild cold of chaos"<sup>16</sup> of the physical wild. An individual is surrounded by "the cunning-hearted and tough, a fighting nature of birds and worms, and a desperate mankind without feelings".<sup>17</sup> Joseph complains:

The world comes after you. It presents you with a gun or a mechanic's tool .... cuts off your future, is clumsy or crafty, oppressive, treacherous, murderous, black, whorish, venal, inadvertently naive or funny.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Saul Bellow, "A Father-to-Be", The New Yorker, 30 (February 5, 1955), pp. 26-30.

16 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 403.

17 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 10.

18 Dangling Man, p. 113.

Writing about Bellow's conception of evil Opdahl rightly observes:

Bellow often conceives of evil - that mentioned by Allbee, say, or Herzog - as a force which is impersonally destructive in the universe and malevolent in animals, reflected in the eyes of Henderson's lions as "clear circles of in human wrath" and rings of black light. He also sees, like D.H. Lawrence, an analogous quality in man: he equates this force with the instinctual drives of the species and the impersonal force and cruelty of the human will.<sup>19</sup>

All this does not exonerate the individual. He is as much responsible for the existence of evil as the inhuman impersonal forces. The subterranean forces in his psyche express themselves into the feelings of alienation and

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<sup>19</sup> Opdahl, pp. 64-65.

horror. It is true that it is society which causes these feelings. Leslie Fiedler in his Waiting for the End blames the historical parametres of American civilization for them. He says:

It is the dream of exile as freedom which has made America; but it is the experience of exile as terror that has forged the self consciousness of Americans.<sup>20</sup>

The individual himself creates an image for himself and tries to live by it. This also leads to evil. According to Clayton:

To be 'human' is, throughout Bellows' fiction, terrifying. And so his heroes turn them selves' into ideal images in order to protect themselves.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Leslie Fiedler, Waiting for the End (New York, 1964,) p. 84.

21 Clayton, p. 76.

This, of course, is right about the individuals who succumb to the forces of society and not about Bellow's protagonists who resist such forces. However, as Augie experiences, people do build towers of Babel for themselves. But tower building leads to alienation from society and also to alienation from reality, as Augie realizes. He observes:

Everyone tries to create a world he can live in, and what he can't use he often can't see. But the real world is already created, and if your fabrication doesn't correspond, then even if you feel noble and insist on there being something better than what people call reality, that better something needn't try to exceed what, in its actuality, since we turn it so little, may be very surprising.<sup>22</sup>

Bellow's protagonists have certain images of themselves and they alienate themselves from society. However, the theme of each Bellow's novel is the hero's attempt to

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22 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 398.

break out from the world of created reality and alienation.

The evil lies in the individual also. Joseph is as much guilty himself for his suffering as are others. He projects the evil in himself on to others. He blames his wife and wants to mould herself according to his own desires and is not ready to grant her freedom he is seeking for himself. He considers Rita proud, obstinate and vulgar but he himself is not free from these elements. Asa Leventhal considers Albee to be anti-Semitic but forgets that in a hidden recess of his heart he too is anti-Gentile. It is only when he admits that he might be responsible for Albee's fall that he finds his release from the prison of his self. Tommy Wilhelm accuses his wife of being cruel to him but he allows her to place burden upon burden on him, though he knows that "no court would have awarded her the amounts he paid". Similarly he provokes his father off and on. He knows that his father does not like drug-taking but he waits until they are together to swallow a phenaphen. He knows that he is tiring the patience of his father and yet he does it. Similarly, Henderson flees Lily, though it is his own trou-

bled spirit which is to blame. Herzog considers his suffering to be due to the desertion of Madeleine but he himself has deserted angelic Mono and domestic Daisy. Sammler dislikes the black pick-pocket but there is a part of him which is in empathy with him. Clayton rightly remarks:

Sammler's New York is crammed with the sexuality and violence he is horrified by, it is in the Jungian sense his own shadow.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever destructiveness is there in society, it is partly due to the evil residing in the individual. The question of evil is, however, not so simple. It has metaphysical dimension also:

It is not just an impersonal physical force but a principle in its own right.<sup>24</sup>

Writing about Herzog Opdahl observes:

Bellow's real concern in the novel is

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23 Clayton, p. 238.

24 Opdahl, p. 19.

evil - a question as metaphysical as  
social.<sup>25</sup>

Richard Ellman considers Herzog's endeavour to understand  
Hadeleine's cruelty to be meditation on human evil. He  
writes:

Her ultimate malevolence is a mystery  
that refuses solution.<sup>26</sup>

However, in the police station Herzog finally understands  
"the pointless, destructive rage which she directs against  
him. It is the emblem, in little, of the cruelty, the mad  
urge for corpses, that generated concentration camps".<sup>27</sup>  
Bradbury treats Mr. Sammler's Planet in the same way.  
According to him the novel is

less a bitter assault on the new radi-  
calism than the beginning of a new kind  
of enquiry into the elements of evil  
secreted in our modern history, and in  
modern America, in an age marked by post-  
cultural energy, a new rootless barbarism

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25 Opdahl, p. 157.

26 Richard Ellman, Sun-Times Book Week, Chicago, September  
27, 1964, p. 1.

27 Ellman, p. 2.



in which possibility and monstrosity  
contend for the soul.<sup>28</sup>

What is true about Herzog and Mr. Samsler's Planet is also more or less true about other novels. In spite of specific nature of evil it has an aspect of mystery about it and the only thing that the self can do is to overcome it by transcending it.

Dellow heroes suffer in this kind of society, they suffer because of their own complexes, they suffer from the spite of those in whose midst they live, they suffer from the impersonality of the physical world and they also suffer by the haunting of

a view of evil which is imaginative and metaphysical, embodied in dreams and sudden insights - "a free-running terror" which goes beyond mechanical destructiveness to become a metaphysical force.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Bradbury, p. 32.

29 Opdahl, p. 19.

They are oppressed by society and find themselves in confrontation with it.

Their reaction is to withdraw, to meditate and cogitate, to go over their experiences and perceptions, to seek abreaction and to reach the true self which can help them overcome the society and world which appear to be apparently inimical. They endeavour to assert the inherent quality of the human soul which is to reconcile the irreconcilables, to achieve disinterestedness and to seek communion. Though our belief in the modern age as "a wasteland - the view that God is dead, society corrupted by size and technology, and the individual overwhelmed"<sup>30</sup> has given rise to the withdrawal of the self from the world, it cannot be said that society is less important than the individual for a meaningful life on this planet. Bellow argues, often obliquely, the acceptance of society. At various places he appears to be afraid of being drowned in the crowd but his heroes sooner than later discover that "far from being daunting and alienating, sheer numbers of individuals do in fact testify to the infinite variety and mystery of the universe".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Opdahl, p.144.

<sup>31</sup> Cronin, p. 196.

Henderson realizes:

We ... should be more accepting of multitudes than we are .... This is marvelous, not depressing.<sup>32</sup>

Bellow does not approve of the naturalistic philosophy of the nature of self. Sammler is skeptical of blaming institutions for the ills of the individual and wants that people should recognize their responsibility, collective as well as individual.

According to the novelist even the ordinary individual is important. This theme is implicit in most novels of the writer but has been beautifully brought out in a short story "Looking for Mr Green". The hero of this story looks for an unemployed crippled black Mr Green in order to give him a relief cheque. Though the store keeper considers the slum-dwellers "worse than animals", Grebe insists that "there must be a way to find a person". It is important to discover Mr Green because if he exists, Grebe can also feel his existence, as marginal as that of the other, to be meaningful. The signifi-

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32 Henderson the Rain King, pp. 161-62.

cance of the story is indicated by this sentence towards the conclusion:

It almost doesn't do any good to have  
a name if you can't be found by it.  
It does not stand for anything. He  
might as well not have any.<sup>33</sup>

Though Grebo finally delivers the cheque to a naked drunken woman, his victory is not in the least negated. "Whoever she was, the woman stood for Mr. Green".<sup>34</sup> Keith Opdahl looks at the search for Mr. Green as "a quest for the final reality behind man's temporary creation".<sup>35</sup> Clayton, however, is able to find out the true significance of the story when he remarks:

Green, and therefore Grebo (the similarity of names indicates the similarity of condition), exists as a separate self. The individual's life means something.<sup>36</sup>

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33 Saul Bellow, "Looking for Mr. Green", Mosby's Memoirs, and Other Stories, New York: Viking Press, 1968, p.157.

34 "Looking for Mr. Green", p. 160.

35 Opdahl, p. 101.

36 Clayton, p. 22.

As a matter of fact Bellow rejects Christian epistemology with its stress on fallen man and other-worldliness. As L.H. Goldman points out:

Bellow's characters constantly contend with this devaluation of the individual: Joseph spars with the Spirit of Alternatives; Asa in The Victim struggles physically with Kirby Allbee; Herzog takes on all Western civilization; Sammler was caught in the vertigo of the Holocaust and almost killed because he was a Jew; Charlie Citrine has to deal with Demmie Vonghel's Fundamentalist anxieties and inhibitions as well as Humboldt's fears of Nazis, the KKK, and the Protestant establishment.<sup>37</sup>

In his novels Bellow celebrates ordinary life. Herzog's rejection of Heidegger's "fall into the quotidian" is nothing but his refusal to give up on ordinary life. Corde appears to be insisting on the inauthenticity of everyday life but he too gets the calm of his mind only when he

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<sup>37</sup> Goldman, p. 55.

accepts the world. As Fuchs remarks:

Loosening one's moral stance, dismissing tradition only as a joke, going further into subjectivity, into the erotics of art - these merely add to the already existing problem. Tied into the monologue though he often is the Bellow protagonist leaves the way to the objective world open.<sup>38</sup>

Bellow's faith in the individual is aligned to his "temper of liberal humanism". Though Bellow believes in the communion between the individual and society, in universal connectedness, he has no fascination for collectivist abstraction. While staying away from "optimism of collectivist humanism" he also avoids "the pessimism of existentialism".<sup>39</sup> His view of life posits integrity in the ordinary world and a political inclination towards Mill rather than Marx. He is like his Herzog who has gone,

as far in his anti-Jacobin<sup>a</sup> tendencies  
as he has in his mistrust of authority -

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<sup>38</sup> Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 307.

<sup>39</sup> Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 162.

all in the interests of preserving  
the narrow and hard-won terrain of in-  
dividual freedom and of individuality.<sup>40</sup>

He cannot approve of anything which is "less than human"  
or "more than human". "More than human, can you have  
any use for life? Less than human, you don't either".<sup>41</sup>  
But man should also learn to live with other creatures,  
he should find joy in his physical nature. Referring to  
the enormous variety and number of animals in The Adven-  
tures of Augie March and Henderson the Rain King. Michael  
O. Bellamy points to the central tenet in Bellow's world  
view. He remarks:

We are reminded by the ubiquity of these  
creatures that man is himself a creature  
whose nature is to be assessed not only  
over against the animal kingdom, but also  
within the animal kingdom in terms of the  
way he interacts with his fellow creatu-  
res.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 162.

41 The Victim, pp. 112-13.

42 Michael O. Bellamy "Bellow's More-or-Less Human Besti-  
aries: Augie March and Henderson the Rain King", Ball  
State University Forum 23, no. 1 (1982), pp. 12-22.

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Augie like many other characters in Bellow realizes the significance of man's creatureliness:

Meanwhile the clouds, birds, Cattle in the water, things stayed at their distance, and there was no need to herd, account for, hold them in the hand, but it was enough to be among them released on the ground as they were in their brook or in the air. I meant something like this when I said occasionally I could look out like a creature.<sup>43</sup>

Chester Eisinger sees the influence of Bellow's Jewish heritage in his outlook on man's connection with the world. According to him:

Bellow's basic attitudes - the overwhelming need for love and the joy in life - bear a remarkable similarity to the principles of Hasidism.<sup>44</sup>

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43 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 330.

44 Chester Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, University of Chicago Press, (1963), p. 343.



It is very difficult to determine Jewish influence on Bellow because he denies any conscious impact of Judaism on him. But there are many similarities between the tenets of Judaism and the perceptions Bellow underscores in his works. Opdahl rightly observes:

Bellow's celebration of the temporal world, his emphasis on community and love, and his rejection of the formal for the spontaneous and individual all write his fiction with Hasidism.<sup>45</sup>

According to Leo Baeck the distinctive qualities of Judaism are its covenant with God, its humanism and emphasis on moral action. L.H. Goldman discovers these essential qualities of Judaism in the novels of Bellow. She writes:

The apocalyptic events of World War II, severing the universal umbilical cord, indicated the devastating results of a loss of societal connectedness and a loss of those imperatives that govern a harmonious world. Bellow seeks to

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<sup>45</sup> Opdahl, p.25.

ameliorate this trauma by re-establishing the nexus that binds men. Bellow's heroes, through language, thought, and action, attempt to rid themselves of the neutrality of science so ruinous to world solidarity, and to recreate the bond of humanitarianism found in words such as "good", "humanity", "dignity", "responsibility". These words have evolved into what European Jewish culture termed menshlichkeit, and they comprise much of the ethical optimism of Judaism.<sup>46</sup>

Bellow's heroes assert the covenant with God, strive for a life of moral dignity and affirm their creatureliness and connection with society.

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46 Goldman, p. 59.

## II

Joseph is a victim hero of "the wartime and post-war period when an agonized existentialism and a sense of human absurdity seeking outward for recovery or commitment had become a dominant language, when feelings of historical and social victimization were strong".<sup>47</sup> He is an alienatee and blames society for the plight of the individual. He is surrounded by underground men, communists, songwriters, businessmen, actors and peddlers of religious pamphlets. The condition of the individual is, however, like the Underground Man of Dostoevsky who feels that "we are oppressed at being men - men with a real body and blood, we are ashamed of it, we think it a disgrace and try to contrive to be some sort of impossible generalized man".<sup>48</sup> Joseph's desire to avoid humanity is the manifest content of his dreams. In one of his dreams he comes to a vault with a guide to reclaim the body of a

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47 Bradbury, p. 35.

48 Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground: The Short Novels of Dostoevsky, trans. Constance Garnett (New York 1945), p. 222.

person who has been killed in a massacre. He records in his diary:

The bodies, as I have said, were lying in cribs, and looked remarkably infantile, their faces pinched and wounded. I do not remember much more. I can picture only the low-pitched long room much like some of the rooms in the Industrial Museum in Jackson Park; the child like bodies with pierced heads and limbs; my guide, brisk as a rat among his charges; an atmosphere of terror such as my father many years ago could conjure for me, describing Gehenna and the damned until I shrieked and begged him to stop; and the syllables Tanza.<sup>49</sup>

He tells the guide that he does not personally know the deceased. The guide smiles and though there was not enough light in the vault to make his meaning unambiguous Joseph thought he said "It's well to put oneself in the clear in something like this".<sup>50</sup> The dream signifies that

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49 Dangling Man, p. 100.

50 Dangling Man, p. 99.

Joseph "avoids involvement with death and with those who die: in other words, with all humanity".<sup>51</sup>

Joseph, however, tries to overcome his impulse to flee humanity. He had himself asked a question "How should a good man live: what ought he to do?"<sup>52</sup> He had wanted:

... 'a colony of the spirit', or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness and cruelty. To hack, to tear, to murder was for those in whom the sense of the temporariness of life had shrunk.<sup>53</sup>

He, however, can move towards connectedness with society only gradually and after much shaking of his consciousness. He comes closer to Iva his wife, and John Pearl, an unhappy artist in Brooklyn. He tells the Spirit of Alternatives

I would be denying my in most feelings  
if I said I wanted to be by-passed and  
spared from knowing what the rest of my

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51 Clayton, p. 99.

52 Dangling Man, p. 32.

53 Dangling Man, p. 32.

eneration is undergoing. I don't want  
to be hurried protectively over my life.<sup>54</sup>

Some sociologists have shown that freedom in America is  
seen as a vacancy to be filled. Joseph's "freedom"  
while he is waiting for the draft is something of a void  
and he rejects it and joins the army. He affirms the  
society:

And I rose rather unsteadily from the  
rocker, feeling that there was an ele-  
ment of treason to common sense in the  
very objects of common sense. Or that  
there was no trusting them, save through  
wide agreement, and that my separation  
from such agreement had brought me peri-  
lously far from the necessary trust,  
auxiliary to all sanity. I had not done  
well alone. I doubted whether anyone  
could. To be pushed upon oneself entirely  
outs the very facts of simple existence  
in doubt.<sup>55</sup>

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54 Dangling Man, p. 138.

55 Dangling Man, p. 158.

Joseph's joining army is not the defeat of the self. If it is defeat of anyone, it is the defeat of his false self. In the novel he is on his way to discover his true self and he realizes that it cannot be done by excluding society. His joining the army is his acceptance of the shared life of the community.

Asa Leventhal's is "another tale of social responsibility discovered and enforced in a world where the task of self-definition seems thrown wholly upon the individual".<sup>56</sup> It is a tale of the relationship between Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee, who as the name suggests symbolically stands for Everyone. On one level it can be said, he functions as an exposition of the relationship that exists between the individual and his fellowmen. Leventhal considers Allbee to be "one of these guys who want you to think they can see to the bottom of your soul".<sup>57</sup> Like the Ifrit of the first epigraph in the novel who stood up to slay the merchant for killing his son by throwing away the stones of the dates he ate, Allbee accuses Leventhal of bringing about his fall. According

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56 Bradbury, p. 40.

57 The Victim, p.27.

to him Leventhal when out of a job picked a quarrel with Allbee's super auditor in an attempt to obtain a much-needed job in order to avenge an anti-hermitic remark made earlier by Allbee during a party which Leventhal had attended. After a few days Allbee himself was dismissed. His wife deserted him and subsequently died. Now Allbee is without work, without money and without any restraint on his drinking habits. Allbee philosophizes about the plight of man in a mechanical culture and much that he says makes good sense. But as Updehl observes he is obviously unbalanced:

There is a "note of impersonation" in his accusations, and a discrepancy between his conversational tone and the look in his eyes makes him seem like an impostor who does not believe his own words. He shifts crazily from "something clear, familiar, and truthful", a sincere remorse for his own failings, to wildly inconsistent charges; he assumes determinism that precludes his own moral responsibility and a free will that makes



Leventhal accountable and thus guilty.<sup>58</sup>

Leventhal gets a job though he strongly suspects that Rudiger had him blacklisted. He also feels himself an impostor and thinks that chance may restore his job to its rightful owner at any time.

Leventhal turns to Barkavy and Williston through whom he got his job for help against Allbee. They assure him that he is not at all responsible for what has happened to Allbee but the latter suggests that Leventhal might not be without responsibility. Now Leventhal sees:

that it was necessary for him to accept some of the blame for Allbee's comedown. He had contributed to it, though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, starts a process which gradually breaks down Leventhal's defences, shatters his sense of security and raises a storm in his spirit. He is compelled to face the reality

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58 Opdahl, p. 54.

59 The Victim, p. 102.

that every person is responsible for another person. This is what binds society in a common bond. Leventhal discovers his true self when he recognizes his fault:

He had used every means, and principally indifference and neglect to avoid acknowledging it and he still did not know what it was. But that was owing to the way he had arranged not to know. He had done a great deal to make things easier for himself, toning down, softening, looking aside. But the more he tried to subdue whatever it was that he resisted the more it raged, and the moment was coming when his strength to resist would be at an end.<sup>60</sup>

Leventhal's perception of man's accountability for another man is strengthened by his relationship with his brother's Italian wife Elena and her sons. He feels that he might have made a mistake in understanding Elena as he made a mistake about Allbee.

If he were wrong about Elena, thought

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60 The Victim, p. 131.

Leventhal, if he had overshot the mark and misinterpreted that last look of hers in the Chapel, the mistake was a terrible and damaging one; the confusion in himself out of which it had risen was more terrible.<sup>61</sup>

Opdahl thinks that *Hellow* passes from a social problem to "the larger metaphysical problem of evil".<sup>62</sup> All the same, the treatment of the "reality of evil" and transcendental glimpses do not in anyway negate the theme of responsibility and the acceptance of society.

Dutton observes that the theme of Seize The Day is "the well-worn dilemma of the individual desperately isolated and profoundly alone, intermittently shunned and used, in a society whose only God is Mammon".<sup>63</sup> Tommy Wilhelm, who has denied his father by changing the name he gave him, experiences "the death throes of a drowning man".<sup>64</sup> He has failed everywhere, in his Hollywood

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61 The Victim, p. 196.

62 Opdahl, p. 52.

63 Dutton, p. 75.

64 Opdahl, p. 96.

ambitions, career in salesmanship and in his marriage. There is a great absurdity about his body and his clothes. He has a hulking body to match his gargantuan emotions. "Though he called himself a hippopotamus, he more nearly resembled a bear".<sup>65</sup> "He liked to wear good clothes, but once he had put it on each article appeared to go its own way".<sup>66</sup> The story of Tommy Wilhelm has been rightly seen,

as a classic story of the Jewish Schlemiel (the type of whom Jewish lore has it, 'If he went into the hat business, babies would be born without heads'), the clown of failure who also contains a virtuous suffering passion.<sup>67</sup>

Tommy Wilhelm summarizes his major mistakes in a mood of self-flagellation:

He wanted to start out with the blessings of his family, but they were never given.

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65 The Victim, p. 23.

66 The Victim, p. 5.

67 Bradbury, p. 53.

he quarrelled with his parents and his sister. And then when he was best aware of the risks and knew a hundred reasons against going and had made himself sick with fear, he left home. This was typical of Wilhelm. After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course <sup>he</sup> had rejected innumerable times. Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife, but ran off and got married. He had resolved not to invest money with Tankin and then he had given him a check.<sup>68</sup>

It is towards the end of the novel he is able to discover clarity in his perceptions about his relationship with others. Tommy is now stripped bare. His father and Tankin have given him up. His wife has broken with him

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68 Seize the Day, p. 23.

finally. He has lost his money.

But if he has lost his place in the world, he has also lost his artifices, his roles, his defences. He is, like Lear, stripped bare. Perhaps now he will have to be reborn, have to love.<sup>69</sup>

He is reborn when he is drowned in tears at the sight of a corpse in a funeral parlour. He "sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need".<sup>70</sup> This scene has been variously interpreted by critics. Some think that Wilhelm sees the image of his father in the dead person. Others hold that it is himself that he imagines to be in the coffin. Clayton very shrewdly observes:

... if Tommy, is symbolically the corpse in the funeral home, perhaps this death can be seen as a release from the burden of self-hood, the death of the presentation self, the impostor soul.

The real soul, according to Tamkin tries

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69 Clayton, p. 132.

70 Seize the Day, p. 118.

constantly to kill the impostor soul,  
and unless it succeeds, "the preten-  
der soul takes away the energy of the  
true soul and makes it feeble like a  
parasite".<sup>71</sup>

But the scene also symbolizes his connection with society.  
He mingles with the crowd though so far he has been living  
like an isolate and through his tears he feels one with  
humanity. M. Gilbert Porter is one of the new critics  
who have been able to plumb the true significance of the  
scene. He remarks:

He cries also, however, for mankind  
for those millions - like himself -  
who have howled like wolves in anguish  
and loneliness from city windows at  
night. He cries for all men who must  
suffer and die; he cries for what  
Virgil called the la crimae rerum, the  
tears in things.<sup>72</sup>

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71 Clayton, p. 132.

72 M. Gilbert Porter, "The Scene as Image: A Reading of  
Seize the Day", Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical  
Essays, ed. Earl Novit, p. 70.

Augie March. is a different kind of hero, not the one who tries to hide himself in his room to avoid society but the one who throws himself joy fully into the colourful world of Chicago. Irving Kristol feels that after having wrestled with demons in his first two novels (Augie March is the third published novel), Bellow "jumped in their midst, hugged them, and enquired if they had read any good books lately".<sup>73</sup> What happens is that for some reason "the incredible effrontery of announcing (him) self to the world.(... the mass world) as a writer and an artist"<sup>74</sup> ceases to trouble him and he creates a hero who "is larky, bright, mercurial and aware," and who affirms the world which is variegated and conscious. In this novel though Bellow reflects the false values of society, and its inherent tendency towards the destruction of the individual, he celebrates it all the same. In the words of Opdahl:

While other writers struggled to discover a new ideology, and felt themselves disarmed by the size and lethargy of their culture Bellow turned from ideology to a world justified in itself.<sup>75</sup>

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73 Irving Kristol, "Review of The Adventures of Augie March", Encounter 3 (July, 1954) p. 74.

74 Saul Bellow, Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, 3rd Series, p. 182.

75 Opdahl, p. 71.



There are critics who think that Augie's constant movement - he is a biographic hero - is an evasion of life and not engagement with it. Podhoretz finds that Augie "goes through everything, yet undergoes nothing".<sup>76</sup> V.S. Pritchett does not think differently. He calls Augie "a neutral, the indifferent man".<sup>77</sup> However, they forget that Augie's neutrality, if it can be called neutrality is only the narrator's objectivity. The narrator in the novel is an older Augie looking back on the adventures of the young Augie.

Augie's experiences in search of a worth while engagement with life and a better fate are unending but the following examples may be considered to be its high lights:

he works as a stockboy in a department store, sells trivia in a railway station, steals and sells text books, begins a university education, becomes a coal salesman, enters the fringes of

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76 Podhoretz, p. 218.

77 V.S. Pritchett, New Statesman and Nation, n.s. 47 (June 19, 1954), p. 203.

the underworld, helps to make a professional fighter, takes care of dogs for the socially elite, falls in love twice, becomes a union organizer, trains an eagle to catch giant lizards in Mexico, skirts the edges of joining Trotsky's cause, joins the Merchant Marine, and he finally marries and settles in Paris, where he is last seen participating in some form of shady international business.<sup>78</sup>

Through all these episodes Augie passes from neutrality to engagement, grows adult and turns inward to discover himself and gains substance as a character. Tom Hopkins remarks that Augie comes to look "more for truth and less for enjoyment, more for consciousness and less for self-immersion".<sup>79</sup> Augie passes through the Machiavellians who in the person of Winhorn tell him that he,

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78 Dutton, p. 42.

79 Tom Hopkinson, "Review of The Adventures of Augie March", London Magazine, 1 August 1954, p. 84.

should choose or seize with force; should make strength from disadvantages and make progress by having enemies, being wrathful or terrible, should hammer on the state of being a brother, not be oppressed by it, should have the strength of voice to make other voices fall silent - that same principle for persons as for peoples, parties states.<sup>80</sup>

Augie, however, feels disillusioned with Bihnorn. Mintouchian who takes the harshest view of human nature elicits more sympathy from Augie. The hero, however, is able to recognize his true self by brooding over his past mistakes. He gains a glimpse of the transcendent reality in his insight into "axial lines". He realizes that a person can get inner strength through these axial lines:

even his pains will be joy if they are true, even his helplessness will not take away his power, even wandering will not take away from himself, even the big

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80 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 183.

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social jokes and hoaxes need not make him ridiculous.<sup>81</sup>

Immediately after this Augie becomes excited about World War II and joins it. His joining is not another escape from the self: it is his affirmation of society as it is in the case of Joseph. At one point in the novel Augie considers rain "an emblem of the shared condition of all". Commenting on this Clayton writes.

In their moments of the truth (Bellow's characters can never hold on to the truth fully) they merge, they stop striving to be individuals, they admit that they are part of humanity ... and when Augie speaks of redemption the image he uses - of rain - is an emblem of the oneness of the many. Indeed this rain is one of the metaphors - water symbolizing the forces against which the individual strives. It is poetically right, then that to be redeemed one must

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81 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 455.

stop striving and must enter the shared condition of all.<sup>82</sup>

Augie shows how we can avoid being either the victim or the "precious personality". It is does not matter, if however, he is not able to live up to his perceptions all the time. Realising wisdom but not being able to live up to it does not negate its validity.

Gloria Cronin considers Henderson the Rain King to be a parody but she holds that the novel is:

Bellow's serious attempt to restore faith in the self and existence by rendering laughable and passe the absurdities of absurdism, the banalities of historicist thinking, and the irony of postmodern sewer searching.<sup>83</sup>

In spite of the comic exuberances of Henderson his story is the story of running away from society for soul-searching and discovery of values and eventual affirmation of society. The affirmation of society is indicated in a

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82 Clayton, p. 125.

83 Cronin, p. 192.

line in the opening lines of the novel:

However, the world which I thought so  
mighty an oppressor had removed its  
wrath from me.<sup>84</sup>

Henderson is afflicted with a horrible depression of spirit and spiritual malaise. While he does not have a yen for "methodically knocking people's hats off" in the city of "old Manhatto", he battles drunkenly with the state troopers of Lenbury, argues unreasonably with his wife Lily, alienates his son and daughter, refuses his tenants heat during the winter, fires his forty-five automatic at their cat, shouts so loudly over a petty argument over a petty disagreement in such a voice that their elderly maid dies of heart attack, raises pigs to annoy his family and neighbour, annoys his friends, acquaintances and community with his unpredicable, irrational and often violent ways and finally lights out for Africa in order to bring some significance to his purposeless and turbulent life. Henderson's quest for spiritual harmony suggests that environment of physical plenitude is no cure for spiritual penury and that affirmation of society is not possible till a person has redeemed his soul. In one of his book reviews Bellow states in unambiguous terms:

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84 Henderson the Rain King, p. 1.

The lives of the castros with their new wealth stand as a warning that the heart may empty as the belly fills ... now that technology extends the promise of an increase of wealth we had better be aware of a poverty of the soul as terrible as that of body.<sup>85</sup>

Henderson's first incursion into Africa is in the land of the Arnewi. Henderson's role in the blowing up of the frogs in the cistern and his behaviour among the people of the tribe cast him into the role of a person more than human, "the role of Messiah". Button sees a more specific statement of Bellow in the episode of the frogs.

The frogs in the water (a symbol of life) are the equivalents of the voices within Henderson's life that cry "I want, I want". The issue is the same: to rid life of its contaminating and frustrating elements, whether those elements be frogs or voices. But

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85 Saul Bellow, "The Uses of Adversity", Reporter 25 (1 October 1959), p. 45.

these frogs, and, by analogy, the voices, are a condition of life; and they belong where they are.<sup>86</sup>

Among the Wariri Henderson undergoes a different kind of experience. Here he meets Uahfu who tries to educate him about his lion therapy. Updahl sums up this therapy in the following words:

Uahfu's theory and treatment are shrewdly appropriate to Henderson's weaknesses, and in fact resolve several issues confronted by other fellow heroes. Uahfu would teach Henderson that "really the danger of life is negligible", even in the lion and the death it symbolizes. Because the lion is at home in the world, because it "does not take issue with the inherent. Is one hundred percent within the given", it exemplifies an acceptance of death which Henderson must emulate.<sup>87</sup>

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86 Lutton, p. 100.

87 Updahl, p. 132.



Henderson is able to move Buzzah and becomes Sungo or the rain king. Henderson failed among the Arnawi because he employed his technical ingenuity. He succeeds in becoming Sungo and bursting the spirit's sleep because he depends on his own resources. But Lion's therapy is inadequate. It is to be less than human in one respect. As Dutton remarks:

Bellow is saying that to base one's existence and position on the fiction of a claimed animal nature can only result in death.<sup>88</sup>

After realizing that man can neither be a god nor an animal, he can neither be totally passive or suffering nor ever warring and active, after discovering his creatureliness with Smolek the bear he returns to civilization and to his family. He tells the airline stewardess:

You know why I'm impatient to see my wife, Miss. I am eager to know how it will be now that the sleep is burst.  
And the children too. I love them very

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<sup>88</sup> Dutton, p. 111.

much. I think.<sup>89</sup>

This clearly is an affirmation of society though it is achieved through externalization of the self and then reaching the essential self.

Herzog presents a contrast to Henderson. If Henderson undergoes a series of physical ordeals, Herzog's struggles are confined to his mental world. According to Giles Gunn, Herzog's "critical recursive, ratiocinative" activity is typical of the characteristic (intellectual experience of our time).<sup>90</sup> Herzog more than any other previous hero of Bellow, is involved in the pursuit of essential self or what Bellow calls in an interview with Matthew Roudane "the primordial person" who is not made,

by his education, nor by cultural or historical circumstances. He precedes culture and history. This means that there is something invariable,

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89 Henderson the Rain King, p. 335.

90 Giles Gunn, The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 61.

ultimately unteachable, native to the  
soul.<sup>91</sup>

For Herzog, as for other Bellow protagonists "ontic self-affirmation" is crucial to personal salvation. According to Tillich "the subject of self-affirmation" is "an individualized self".<sup>92</sup>

Herzog's mental journey through multiple thoughts and values in quest of his primordial self does not in any way preclude the affirmation of society which is more clearly stated in this novel than in any previous fictive work of the writer. If a person is able to recover his soul from the clutter and flutter of modern materialistic society, he can see the oneness of all human beings and discover universal connection. What brings Herzog to contemplate on human condition and his on own is the failure of his second marriage with Madeleine. He is shocked by the behaviour of Madeleine and Gersbach and

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91 Matthew Roudane, "An Interview with Saul Bellow", Contemporary Literature 25, 3 (Fall 1984), p. 276.

92 Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 42-47.

is apprehensive about the security of his daughter June. He is not able to understand the behaviour of those around him. He has been twice married and twice divorced. He has been turned out of his own house by Adeleine, cuckolded by his friend Gersbach, bullied and used by his psychiatrist, lawyer, and doctor. Though he is pitied by his family and friends, he is unable to pursue his academic profession and is financially broke. So,

Late in spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends.<sup>93</sup>

Though there are traces of the affirmation of society<sup>94</sup>

93 Herzog, p. 2.

94 Ellen Hifer also holds the same view "Yet while playing the part of ardent prince, or "King of hearts" - perpetually "embracing his Landas, Zinkas, and Ramonas" - "amorous Herzog" has longed for a more meaningful existence. He has yearned for that "wider range of human feelings" he experienced as a child - when, despite material poverty, existence was richly permeated by love in many forms: Love for family, for one's fellow human beings, for a physical and social environment to which one belonged, and (in contrast to his recent self-contempt) for oneself, pp.125-26.

scattered all over the novel they culminate in a scene which is the climax of the novel. Herzog has been trying to overcome his violent impulses and has achieved moments of serenity. But when he visits the court in connection with his divorce suit, he listens to a case in which a woman is accused of murdering her own child. He is also reminded of the complaint of his maid that his daughter June was once locked in a car by Madeleine and Gersbach. His murderous impulse resurges and going to his ancestral house, he steals his father's pistol and goes to shoot both the lovers. He sees through a window very touching scene of Gersbach bathing and washing his daughter tenderly.

He got into her ears with the washrag as she screamed, cleaned off her face, the nostrils, wiped her mouth. He spoke with authority, but affectionately and with grumbling smiles and occasionally with laughter he bathed her - soaped, rinsed, dipping water in her toy boats to rinse her back as she squealed and twisted. The man

washed her tenderly .... The hated traits were all there. But see how he was with June, scooping the water on her playfully, kindly.<sup>95</sup>

The concrete reality over takes abstraction. He realizes the destructiveness of 'self-hatred' which "could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was 'broken'".<sup>96</sup> Pifer aptly remarks on the spiritual regeneration of Herzog:

Although Herzog now "congratulated" himself on his luck, it is not luck but liberating insight - "a true change of heart" - that effects his recovery.

From severe "atrophy of the chest", to recall Lewis's phrase Herzog is redeemed by his own generous feelings: "His breath came back to him: and how good it felt to breathe!"<sup>97</sup>

It is love, generous feeling and forgiveness that bind

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95 Herzog, p. 257.

96 Herzog, p. 258.

97 Pifer, p. 122.

the self with society. This affirmation of society is also confirmed by Herzog's reception of Ramona whose sensuality he fears toward's the end of the novel. He is now an assertive host though still wary of sexual combat. He tells Ramona that "You'll do nothing of the sort" when she offers to bring wine. He arranges flowers on the dinner table and rejects the suspicion that they will be a pledge of commitment. As Pifer points out:

These are small matters, admittedly, yet as Herzog has acknowledged, it is in the specific details of 'ordinary experience' - in the realm not of "ideas" but of concrete actuality - that a person's "change of heart" proves real or illusory.<sup>98</sup>

Herzog's affirmation of society is quite explicit in his following words:

I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God

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<sup>98</sup> Pifer, p. 126.

a human life, this is where I fall down.  
 'Man liveth not by self alone, but in  
 his brother's face. Each shall behold  
 the Eternal Father and love and joy  
 abound'. When the preachers of dread  
 tell you that others only distract you  
 from metaphysical freedom then you must  
 turn away from them. The real and essen-  
 tial question is one of our employment by  
 other human beings and their employment  
 by us.<sup>99</sup>

No one in Hellow can complain against society if he wishes  
 to, so much as Sammler. He has known to the utmost the  
 "free ways of barbarism, under the protection of civilized  
 order, property rights, refined technological organiza-  
 tion",<sup>100</sup> in New York but more so in Auschwitz where he  
 was a witness to the holocaust, when he saw his wife mur-  
 dered and where he himself had to walk out <sup>of</sup> a mass grave  
 and where he murdered a naked, defenceless Nazi soldier.  
 He, however, has been striving to reconnect himself to

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<sup>99</sup> Herzog, p. 272.

<sup>100</sup> Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 8.



mankind. Living on financial help given by his nephew  
 Tlya Truner, the septuagenarian hero is unsparing in  
 his criticism of contemporary culture and society and  
 though he denies it, the novel is a testimony to his  
 grim fascination for "slashing through the masks of  
 appearances".<sup>101</sup> In spite of this he seeks communion  
 with society. Susan Glickman rightly observes:

To give him his due, he is quite aware  
 of his own role as the prophet from the  
 past, and, indeed, the fierceness of his  
 scrutiny derives in part from a desire  
 to discern some common humanity, some  
 shared principles of being, which can  
 join him to the human race from which he  
 declares his independence.<sup>102</sup>

As a survivor of the death camps, as a widower and as an  
 old European afloat in the American cult of youth, he  
 starts as an alienatee but does not believe in aliena-  
 tion. He is a receptacle of the experiences of others  
 and a philosophic observer of life. His primary concerns

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101 Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 110.

102 Susan Glickman, "The World as Will and Idea: A Com-  
 parative Study of An American Dream and Mr. Sammler's  
 Planet", Modern Fiction Studies 28, no. 4 (Winter  
 1982-83), pp. 569-82.

are both humanistic and religious. He is a devotee of Meister Eckhart and is occupied with religious questions throughout the book. In this context Dutton's remarks are highly appreciable:

Mr. Sammler's Planet is the story of a man who finds himself in a world of mad encounter caused by an imbalance between these two forces of science and religion.<sup>103</sup>

Sammler realizes the inadequacy of the scientific and rational views of H.G. Wells, psychoanalytic views of Freud and economic views of Karl Marx. He even rejects Govind Lal's new utopian fantasy of an ascetic lunar colony. M. Gilbert Porter observes:

The moon serves in the novel as the central symbol for both the goal of advanced technology and the future of man. But, in Sammler's view, the technological advances appear to be occurring in a

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103 Dutton, p. 140.

moral void and thus the future of man  
is uncertain.<sup>104</sup>

Sammler realizes that the felt idea of immortality is rooted in the deep human intimations and not in any rational scientific thinking. He prefers to stay in the midst of chaos, violence, and sensuality of this planet to the scientifically built colony on the moon.

Sammler's affirmation of society is clearly discernible in the black pick-pocket's episode which in a way is central to the structure of the novel. Sammler disapproves his act but watches him off and on. This is what humanity is, flawed and vitiated, but it cannot be avoided. Sammler finds a sort of dignity in this black prince of Harlem and when he is beaten by his son-in-law Eisen, he feels sympathetic towards him. It is difficult to agree with Clayton who considers Bellow's attitude towards the black pick-pocket, the attitude of "projection and denial" in the psychoanalytic sense. Nor can we fully agree with Robert Boyers that Sammler suffers

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104 M. Gilbert Porter, Whence the Power? (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), p. 172.

for him" because the idea of noblesse he somehow incarnates has been wantonly soiled by those who have no real sense what noblesse might mean for all of us".<sup>105</sup> In fact Sammler suffers for him because he has a human bond with him.

Sammler's love for humanity is also seen in his relationship with Elya Gruner. This patron of the protagonist is not a very moral person. Sammler suspects that in his long career as a gynecologist, he "performed abortions to oblige old Mafia friends".<sup>106</sup> But evil is part of human existence and cannot be denied by mere withdrawal from society. Sammler admires Elya and loves him. It is difficult to agree with Clayton when he says:

We don't see in the relationship of Sammler and Gruner a model of deep, loving friendship; we don't see in Gruner himself a loving man.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Robert Boyers, "Nature and Social Reality in Bellow's *Sammler*", *Salmagundi*, XXX (Summer 1975), p. 37.

<sup>106</sup> *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, p. 130.

<sup>107</sup> Clayton, p. 246.

This view is not supported by the text and negates the beautiful prayer Sammler offers for Elya:

'Well, Elya. Well, well, Elya'. And then in the same way he said, 'Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as possible and as well as he was able, and even to an intolerable point, and even in suffocation and even as death was coming was eager, even childish perhaps (may I be forgiven for this), even with a certain servility, to do what was required of him.'<sup>108</sup>

Thus, as Malcolm Bradbury observes:

Sammler gazes on Elya Gruner's corpse and sees in his greater corruption yet also his greater kindness an assertion of the necessary human contact which all must meet, because 'we know, we know, we know'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Mr. Sammler's Planet, p. 251.

<sup>109</sup> Bradbury, p. 82.

Sammler reads Meister Eckhart but Charlie Citrine updates his sense of mysticism and reads the modern mystic Rudolf Steiner. Citrine, however, has not been able to be free from the distractions of society. His associations with Rinaldo Cantabile and various women viz., Naomi Lutz, Dammie Vonghel, Denise and Renata bear ample testimony to this. Most of them offer him promise of fame, status, power, money, love, beauty youth and other guarantees. As Malcolm Bradbury says:

Charlie now has to live, without the ambitious wife, though with her high alimony expectations, in a new America, an age of the wised-up rabble, where society rewards and demolishes its artists indiscriminately, by making art affluent succour, by swathing itself in cultural goods, by joking with the imagination while denying its lessons.<sup>110</sup>

Citrine is also a poet but as Alvin Kernan points out

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<sup>110</sup> Bradbury, p. 88.

that in spite of his "Wordsworthian intimations that he was singled out for some great work in the world", most of his oeuvre is historical and political in nature dealing with facts and not imagination. The critic observes:

This is not the oeuvre of a poet or any great imaginative writer, but the market place determined writing of a man who gives the world what it wants and will buy.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, he too appears going the way of his friend Humboldt whose catastrophe is succinctly described by Citrine in the following words:

That Charming fluent deeply worried man to whom I was so attached, passionately lived out the theme of Success. Naturally he died a Failure. What else can result from the Capitalization of such means.<sup>112</sup>

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111 Alvin B. Kernan, "Humboldt's Gift", Saul Bellow, ed. Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 184-85.

112 Humboldt's Gift, p. 6.

The story of Humboldt's Gift is the story of Citrine who discovers the situation he is in and tries to retrieve his imagination through the legacy of Humboldt. He tells Kathleen:

Now I begin to understand what Tolstoi was getting at when he called on mankind to cease the false and unnecessary comedy of history and begin simply to live.<sup>113</sup>

Citrine has now realized the truth about Humboldt's "heart break and madness" and asserts:

Now we must listen in secret to the sound of the truth that God put into us.<sup>114</sup>

But this does not mean that Citrine rejects either the world or society. Clayton is right when he says that in Humboldt's Gift, the yearning for transcendence is much more complete - a Platonic transcendence, stretching

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113 Humboldt's Gift, p. 477.

114 Humboldt's Gift, p. 477.



towards an unrealized",<sup>115</sup> but wide off the mark when he adds,

Like Bunyan's Christian, Charlie flees  
a world of death, a world in which he  
himself will die.<sup>116</sup>

He fails to realize the significance of Humboldt's Gift. It is not only a worldly gift but as Jeanne Braham says, "is also a human legacy of forgiveness for old disputes and past indifference".<sup>117</sup> It is this which holds human society together and realizing this Citrine not only affirms universal connection but in an indirect way our connectedness with the society we live in.

Albert Corde's engagement with society is more positive than Citrine's. The social problems of Chicago and Bucharest are realistically rendered in the novel. As Michael G. Yetman notes, "Bellow's critique of Rumania, what Corde calls a 'socialist wonderland' and a 'bughouse Country' is like the place itself unsparingly harsh".<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Clayton, p. 281.

<sup>116</sup> Clayton, p. 281.

<sup>117</sup> Jeanne Braham, A Sort of Columbus: The American Voyages of Saul Bellow's Fiction (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 34.

<sup>118</sup> Yetman, p. 267.

But his treatment of Chicago is not much different. Corde himself reflects:

But I (damn!) starting to collect material for a review of life in my native city, and finding at once wounds, lesions, cancers, destructive fury, death, felt (and how quirkily) called upon for a special exertion - to interpret, to pity, to save!<sup>119</sup>

Corde's problem is however, that of understanding social reality. Much of our ills are there because we are not able to understand them imaginatively. Corde does not fail to realize this:

I meant that we'd better deal with whatever it is that's in us by nature, and I don't see people being willing to do that. What I mainly see is evasion. But this is a thing that works on the substance of the soul - the spirit of the time, in us by nature, working on

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119 The Dawn's December, p. 201.

every soul. We prefer to have such things served up to/as <sup>us</sup> concepts. We'd rather have them abstract still born, dead. But as long as they don't come to us with some kind of reality, as facts of experience, then all we can have instead of good and evil is ... well, concepts.<sup>120</sup>

Corde has written a couple of articles on Chicago which have raised a storm against him at home. Defending himself against the apocalyptic images of decay, he interprets the problem of the violence of the "black under-class" as the problem of communication and connection. Social and economic establishments have failed to reach it:

We do not know how to approach this population. We haven't even conceived that reaching it may be a problem. So there's nothing but death before it.<sup>121</sup>

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120 The Dean's December, p. 243.

121 The Dean's December, p. 207.

The consequences of this communication gap are dangerous. Pifer observes:

The communication gap is filled by drugs, crime, sexual assault: they are the means by which a doomed population speeds the tortuously slow process of its own extinction.<sup>122</sup>

So the directing impulse of Corde's life is as he puts it:

To recover the world that is buried under the debris of false description or non experience.<sup>123</sup>

In spite of the apparent hostility of the world manifest in the Colonel of Communist Bucharest, Dewey Spangler, a high school peer who has now fortified himself within the Fourth Estate by embellishing reports with trendy allusions to the art and the Provost of his College and others, like Sam Varennes, Mason Zaehner, Jr. However, Corde continues the task of making contact, finding connection, exploring the human soulscape and rediscovering

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<sup>122</sup> Pifer, p. 166.

<sup>123</sup> The Dean's December, p. 243.

the ontological nature of human communication and objective reality. The summit of his experience reaches while he sits on the 'sixteenth story porch' of their lakeside apartment and while he ascends in the elevator at Palomar. In the words of Pifer:

Here, as at Mt Palomar, the condition of being "drawn to feel and penetrate further" becomes an "internal fact" signalling the individual's connection to creation. In this way Corde's "soul finds an exit not from reality but, as Henderson says, from "unreality".<sup>124</sup>

Corde's affirmation of society consists in reaching the inner reality of the persons he comes into contact and his "acceptance of the givenness of the world around him".<sup>125</sup> We can discover a new kind of maturity in Corde towards

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<sup>124</sup> Pifer, p. 178.

<sup>125</sup> Roudane, "Cri de Coeur: The Inner Reality of Saul Bellow's The Dean's December", pp. 5-17.

the end of the novel. When he hears that Ricky Lester's murderers have been convicted and a legal victory has been secured for Lydia Lester, Corde feels worked up but does not celebrate. He has now become "more capable of objectively grounding his perceptions in a cause he championed".<sup>126</sup> Corde's response to certain key figures in the novel also reveals the mellowing of his spiritual vision. He feels intuitive love for Valeria even when her body has perished in the crematorium. He is able to view Spangler's inner reality. He also gains the renewed love of Minna. For the first time, at the end of the novel, Corde and Minna are able to attend to each other with felt love and a sense of honest commitment. The novelist points out that Corde "seemed to be picking up signals from all over the universe, some from unseeable sources".<sup>127</sup> However, it is through Minna's support only that he is able to interpret these signals clearly. It is Minna, regenerated after the death of her mother, who

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126 Roudane, "Cri de Coeur: The Inner Reality of Saul Bellow's The Dean's December", pp. 5-17.

127 The Dean's December", p. 132.

helps Corde relocate "some semblance of meaning and value in the complex business of living".<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Boudane, "Cri de Coeur: The Inner Reality of Saul Bellow's The Dean's December", pp. 5-17.

## FORMAL STRATEGIES

Like a contemporary intellectual Saul Fellow is apprehensive of any type of closure, social, political, intellectual, emotional, physical or metaphysical. What he dreads most is claustrophobia. He does not want to be confined and so he is unwilling to be defined. There are many things he upholds: man's spiritual yearnings, the humanistic relevance of values, man's love for man, the assertion of true self and the strong individual impulse for societal connectedness. All this is clearly manifest in his non-fictional writings, in his interviews with various critics, his Nobel Prize speech and various other writings. However, he avoids having the last word on anything. His writings, fictional and non-fictional, are marked by open-endedness, by fluidity and by indeterminacy. In his formal strategies he does not explore in post-modern techniques like Pynchon, Barth, Vonnegut and others.



Bradbury rightly remarks:

Bellow is not, in the fashionable sense of the term, a 'post-modern' or even an 'experimental novelist. He does not question reflexively his own fictionality, or adopt the nihilist stoicism of black humour.<sup>1</sup>

All the same, he takes to such devices as save him from any final commitment and evince his omnivorous genius as a writer and thinker.

One of the areas in which his typical formal devices are too manifest is his treatment of character. There are many who like Alain Robbe-Grillet believe that "the novel of characters belongs entirely to the past".<sup>2</sup> Bellow does not agree with him because for him it is nonsensical to drop "character" just on "the theoretical ground that the period which marked the apogee of the

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1 Bradbury, p. 32.

2 Alain Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 26.

individual ... is ended".<sup>3</sup> But he cannot accept character as "fixed", as factual identity and as functional. Like Dostoevsky he is against anything which is for human predictability. What he does in his novels is to explore the self which cannot be tied down to any concept or theory. His protagonists think but they are not bound by ideas. As Porter Abbott rightly asserts the recurrent theme of numerous essays and interviews of Bellow is that "there is a difference between thinking and having an idea".<sup>4</sup> There are theorists in Bellow's novels but they too express their originality in their theories and they are also made to fail as theorists. Bellow is in favour of characters who continually surprise us. Dahfu is one of those lovable theorists whose ellipticism and capacity to contradict themselves are too apparent. However, figures like Tamkin, Bumidge, and Basteshaw reveal the darker aspects of the theorists who want to impose their conception of reality on mankind for its own good. Bellow has no sympathy for fascist reality instructors.

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3 Saul Bellow, Nobel Lecture (Stockholm: U.S. Information Service, 1977), p. 10.

4 H. Porter Abbott, pp. 264-83.

Bellow's interest in the quest of the self and society is revealed through his interest in character much more than that in plot-structure. He conceives character as a nexus of impulses, passion, enigma, felt thought and freedom. In fact, self in a way means freedom for him. The novelist allows his characters to invent themselves, to reveal themselves and to forge themselves ahead in the quest of the transcendental intimations and societal connectedness without any "reverential intrusion as a novelist". He would perhaps agree with the revisionist Marxist critic Herbert Marcuse when he says:

With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity the individual steps out of the net work of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another sphere of existence... the domain ... of the inner resources of the human being: passion imagination, conscience.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Herbert Marcuse, "Excerpts from The Aesthetic Dimension", American Poetry Review, VII (March-April, 1978), p. 14.

The absence of the author from the world of his characters is too obvious. We do not find him even paring his nails behind the scenes. Rueben Frank states about Joseph:

the author vanishes from the area between the reader and Joseph's consciousness, only to be perceived behind the latter, too artfully directing that which we take a free and spontaneous movement.<sup>6</sup>

Bellow sticks to this kind of presence (if it can be called a presence) in almost all the novels. The character in him is not an object to be seen from outside. He in fact becomes a subject under his his own observation. It is the character who views himself, churns his impulses and impressions and not the reader or the novelist. Bellow like Ellison identifies genuine character with freedom. In his review of Ellison's novel Invisible Man Bellow called it a superb book and admired

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6 Rueben Frank, "Saul Bellow: The Evolution of a Contemporary Novelist", Western Review 18 (Winter 1954), p. 103.

Ellison's rejection of all kinds of determinisms.

Making a character a witness of his own psychic drama is an important narrative strategy of Bellow. Joseph writes his diary and introspectively examines various aspects of his freedom and true self. He has his double, the Spirit of Alternatives, trying to make him evaluate his inner consciousness with utmost freedom. So is the case with Leventhal who with his double Allbee examines both the visible and hidden sides of his inner self. In Augie March Bellow takes a more decisive and definite step. Here Augie looks at his own experiences not as he lived them but as he viewed them later in life. It is not the young Augie who is writing about himself but the older one who is reviewing the experiences of a person who is,

an uncommitted wanderer upon the face  
of the earth, savouring experience for  
its infinite variety and cherishing  
his independence to see it out where  
it may.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Eisinger, p. 355.

Opdahl is one of those few critics who understand the narrative strategy of the novelist. He observes:

Although Augie March is told in the first person, Bellow makes a clear distinction between his narrator and his protagonist. The voice of the novel is not that of the young Augie living his adventures but that of an older man looking back on them. The narrator occasionally identifies with the story, but just as often stands back from it. "I see this now", he will say. "At that time not".<sup>8</sup>

Bellow perfects this technique in Herzog. Here the narrator is the witness "not only on the activity of his own consciousness but on the state of the age".<sup>9</sup> However, Bradbury calls him "an alternative and unreliable witness". It is difficult to swallow the word "unreliable".

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8 Opdahl, p. 73.

9 Bradbury, p. 75.

The worst that can be said about Herzog as the narrator is that he is inconclusive or all inclusive. In fact, as Porter Abbott points out:

Herzog himself is reading Herzog. He reflects upon himself as he would upon a character. Thus, as confined as the book is to the interior Herzog, the mind we hear is continually engaged in trying to gain knowledge of it self by reading the acts it has a part in directing.<sup>10</sup>

Opdahl makes similar observation:

He makes an object of himself, seeing himself as others see him. But he then makes still another removal from himself: "Satisfied with his own severity, positively enjoying the hardness and factual rigor of his judgment, he lay on his sofa".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> H. Porter Abbot, pp. 264-83.

<sup>11</sup> Opdahl, p. 156.

Bellow adopts this device of deconstructing the protagonist's self in various other novels, particularly, in Mr. Sammler's Planet and Humboldt's Gift. This allows him an added advantage of objectivity. The perceptions and the felt thoughts of Bellow's several protagonists are not much different from their creator's. All the same, it <sup>is</sup> through such devices that Bellow usually gains a distance from his creations and the effect of his fiction is not damaged by his being too autobiographical. He is like Dostoevsky who all but devastates his own position. Bellow feels that, "the opposites must be free to range themselves against each other, and they must be passionately express<sup>ed</sup> on both sides".<sup>12</sup>

Even in the matter of formal structure Bellow prefers such devices as suit his protagonist's going over things and endless "silent self-examination". Whereas in Dangling Man it is the Journal intime<sup>13</sup> a necessarily informal genre, adaptable to the spontaneous expressions of the inner self",<sup>13</sup> in many others like

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12 Saul Bellow, "Where Do We Go From Here: The Future of Fiction", To the Young Writer, ed. A.L. Baker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 146.

13 H. Porter Abbott, pp. 264-83.



Augie March, Henderson, Humboldt's Gift it is first person narrative. Even where it is omniscient narrator as in The Victim, Seize the Day, Herzog and The Dean's December, his voice is above and within the protagonist and is as much sympathetic as it is hard-headed. Bellow uses a new device of using letters composed in mind and not put down on paper and never sent to the persons addressed in Herzog. He himself describes the form of his novel when he says about Herzog, "he was earnest, he had a certain large, immature sincerity but he might never succeed in becoming systematic".<sup>14</sup> The letters permit the novelist "to write about the private life of a passive character"<sup>15</sup> and this epistolary penchant of Herzog may be considered to be an elaboration of Henderson's letter to Lily in which his italicized thoughts often intrude. Bellow says that he wrote the last fifty pages of Henderson including the letter at a feverish and exultant pitch. In Augie March and Henderson, where the writer has to externalize the self, he takes to a conventional fictional form,

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<sup>14</sup> Herzog, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Opdahl, p. 155.

the picaresque novel. Augie says about the form of the novel,

I have taught myself, free style, and  
will make the record in my own way  
first to knock, first admitted, some-  
times an innocent knock, sometimes a  
not so innocent.<sup>16</sup>

Henderson too is directed by his irrepressible being, by his compulsive inner voice "I want" and wants to satisfy it in the darkness of Africa. In the words of Bradbury, "it is structured on a capacious self-narrating and a free and open pattern of adventures".<sup>17</sup> So the picaresque form suits both the novels but characteristically enough the novelist inverts the form in order to suit it to his quest for the true self. The techniques of the picaresque novel preclude any sympathy for the picaro's victims. The novelist creates a society which deserves to be fleeced and sponged. But the purpose of Saul Bellow in Augie March and Henderson is to

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16 The Adventures of Augie March, p. 3.

17 Bradbury, p. 56.

reveal the self in contact and conflict with the world. So he uses only the traditional element of journey in both the novels and reverses the essential techniques. In Augie March the hero is not the picaro but the victim. The traditional victims of a picaresque novel here acquire distinct identities and become the Machiavellians. Though the hero's character is thin, as many critics have alleged, he remains an affirmative character. According to Opdahl:

Bellow does this by using the techniques directed at the picaro's victims on Augie himself.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Henderson's bumptious spirit can be revealed only through his adventures. Again, it is not those whom he comes into contact with who are rendered comic but the protagonist himself. His series of adventures are in a way misadventures and reveal the animal ridens in the individual. However, he comes off these adventures with a spirit of affirmation and a longing for higher things. "But, where Augie passes through a world

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<sup>18</sup> Opdahl, p. 82.

of loosely enlarging social experience with metaphorical potential", says Bradbury, "Henderson explores his vitalistic desires in a landscape that is quickly transformed from one of social and historical specificity ... into legendary time and mythic space".<sup>19</sup>

In his Nobel Prize speech Bellow defines a novel as a balance "between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that make up most of what we call life".<sup>20</sup> A novel, thus, must require considerable formal flexibility and variousness and though Bellow is no experimentalist his novels amply evidence this. All the same, two kinds of structures and two kinds of modes, are quite obvious in all his novels: the traditional and the subjective structure, the historical and the confessional mode. The action in the outside world is in dialectical tension with the inner searchings of the psyche. While Joseph is shut in his room enquiring into the question of human freedom even to the point of deconstructing the self he wishes to protect, he

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<sup>19</sup> Bradbury, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> As cited by Bradbury, p. 15.

occasionally forays into the outer world and quarrels with Etta and Vanaker. This juxtaposition of memories and events, reminiscences and action helps him to discover the significance of his existence. The double structure is more palpable in The Victim. In fact, it assumes the form of the double plot. On the one hand, we have Leventhal's claustrophobic meetings with Allbee, on the other we have his reaction and responses towards the family of his brother Max who is away. It is both these plots which make him grasp the true meaning of responsibility and its role in connection with society. In Augie March it manifests itself in converging and diverging lines of action that is, Augie's running away from one Machiavellian and embracing the other in the need to be free and adopted alternately. Henderson's experiences between the Arnewi and the Wariri form contrasting subplots and are bridged only by the exuberant, soul searching spirit of Henderson. The technique of double structure almost reaches its achme in the later novels of Bellow. Herzog is a superb example in point. In spite of the mismanaged and patternless life of Herzog, his explorations of his inner being are set against a few

significant actions, his going to the court, to Chicago to revenge himself on Madeleine and his meeting with Remona. The novelist gives the impression of chaos reigning in the protagonist's mind by saying that "at first there was no pattern to the notes he made",<sup>21</sup> but he also stresses the need of some sort of order by relating later on that Herzog "was busy, busy, in pursuit of objects he was only now, and dimly, beginning to understand".<sup>22</sup> In Mr. Sammler's Planet the pattern is varied. Now we have two kinds of parallel actions presided over by the brooding consciousness of Sammler. On the one hand, we have local stories of sexual perversions, crime and violence, student revolt and so on, on the other, we have a long neo-scientific enquiry into the biological future of men and the possibility of a colony on the moon. Meditating on this apparently confusing multiverse, Sammler "manages to discover, beneath the order and sloppiness of the life as it has been lived, a fundamental human thirst for order and even for a kind of stunted, broken social responsibility".<sup>23</sup> Humboldt's Gift is again built on a

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21 Herzog, p. 2.

22 Herzog, p. 102.

23 McConnell, p. 45.

similar dichotomy. As Clayton rightly remarks:

On the one hand is the experience of distraction; on the other is Charlie's experience of an inner light; in the one world the poet is fool; in the other he is at moments in touch with sacred reality.<sup>24</sup>

Many critics have pointed out that Bellow's achievement as a craftsman lies in the intensity and complexity of individual scenes rather than in the tight structure of the plot. The scenes that come ready to one's memory are Joseph's encounter with Etta and Wanaker, Leventhal's fateful meetings with Albee, Augie's tussles with his mentors, Henderson's adventures among the Arnewi and the Wariri, the bathing of June, court episodes and the visit of Ramona in Herzog, the episode of the black pick-pocket and the death scene of Elya Gruner in Mr. Sammler's Planet and Valeria's death and funeral in The Dean's December. Bellow's beginnings in his novel usually turn on a contentious note but the ending indicates a kind of calm serenity. However, the ending of a novel is more remarkable than the beginning and by its inconclusive

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24 Clayton, p. 265.

-ness it indicates the tentative but assured perceptions of the novelist. This is like saying that I feel like this but do you also? It is to avoid imposing one's will on other, a thing which Herzog experiences when he goes to Chicago to shoot the lovers. To kill a person is to impose one's will on him.

The ambivalent and open endings ofellow's novels reveal his claustrophobia, his distrust of concepts and formulations. It is because of this that the endings of his novels have been interpreted variously. The ending of Dangling Man is well known for its being ambivalent. Joseph's cry at the end of the novel in the words of Bradbury "is a testament of loss, a testament of gain, an acquiescence in the defeat of the solitary free spirit in its solipsism, but an embrace of historical attachment..."<sup>25</sup> Joining the army is not the final move and, as Joseph says, "next move" is "the world's".<sup>26</sup> Joseph may become like Henderson who is an ex-serviceman and who again comes back to the point from where Joseph started. Similarly, the story of Leventhal and Allbee does

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25 Bradbury, p. 39.

26 Dangling Man, p. 158.



not end with brief epilogue that comes at the end of the book. In the beginning of the novel it was Allbee who wanted to speak to Leventhal. Now it is Leventhal's turn to try to speak to Allbee, who runs away from him and swiftly disappears in the aisles of the theatre. Scheer-Schazler is rightly to remark:

Significantly, to indicate the suspended, open state of their relationship, the last phrase that Leventhal tries to address to him is a question.<sup>27</sup>

Seize the Day is ambivalent not only in its conclusion but in its very being as a novel. It, "portrays a problem rather than its solution", remarks Opdahl, "and in doing so crystallizes the ambivalence that lies within Bellow's vision". He further adds:

There is no doubt that Wilhelm is weak and masochistic, but there is even less doubt that his final grief is a triumph of greater depth than purgation or self knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

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27 Brigitte Scheer-Schazler, p. 22.

28 Opdahl, p. 98.

In Augie March, it is not clear whether the protagonist will retain his spiritual insight into the "axial lines" or lose them by engaging himself in black marketing, as he does, at the end of the novel.

The ending of The Dean's December is not so conclusive as it appears to be. Matthew Houdané writes to stress this fact:

Like the ending of an Albee play, the closing of The Dean's December offers no guarantee that the future will be secure: "It won't be a restful life", Minna accurately confides to her husband".<sup>29</sup>

The endings of Henderson, Herzog and Mr. Sammler's Planet are superb and reveal the spiritual urges of man. They, however, in no way show the protagonist's rejection of society. The ambivalence of these novels lies in living in the world and transcending it, keeping the true self inviolate and yet seeking connection with the mankind.

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29 Houdané, "Cride Coeur: The Inner Reality of Saul Bellow's The Dean's December", pp. 5-17.

Transcendentalism becomes stronger in later novels like Mr. Sammler's Planet, Humboldt's Gift and The Dean's December but the novelist retains his ambivalence.

The novelist also reveals his divided vision in his use of time. As Judie Newman remarks:

Bellow's work presents an increasingly overt tension between the timeless and the timebound.<sup>30</sup>

He sets the temporal time against the subjective time, historical against the mythical and the contingent against the eternal.

There are three kinds of time in Augie March. There is historical time which relates to Chicago section of the book. There is the mythic time of the plumed serpent and nature deities in Augie's adventures in Mexico. And finally we have time bound or time free existence in the European world of art. In Henderson the hero while dancing around the plane towards the end of the novel, "celebrates not the frozen moment but the

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30 Judie Newman, "Saul Bellow's Sixth Sense: The Sense of History", Canadian Review of American Studies 13 (Spring 1982), pp 39-52.

Cyclic dance of human life". As Judie Newman writes:

The novel moves from an initial refutation of time to a loving acceptance of it and willingness to exist within it.<sup>31</sup>

The acceptance of time implies social affirmation on the part of the hero.

The subjective time, for example, in Herzog, as McConnell puts it, is "only a moment, a moment of infinite expansion" set against the whole history of Western thought, Jewish tradition and against the hero's private passions. But it is "nevertheless a moment, the moment in which he chooses to accept his fate, to forgive life itself for its monstrosity, to stop writing letters".<sup>32</sup> The real time in Mr. Sammler's Planet, is a week but significantly this can be associated "with the Great Week, the seven days of creation or the seven days, the seven tasks, through which the primal intellect moves in forming an ordered, humanized universe".<sup>33</sup> There are two time-

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31 Judie Newman, pp. 39-52.

32 McConnell, p. 42.

33 McConnell, p. 45.

frames in Humboldt's Gift, the febrile and apocalyptic present of Citrine and the doomed but brilliant past of Humboldt.

These two schemes can be called horizontal and vertical. In the former Citrine moves forward into the present and then backward into the past in the Cantabile plot. In the vertical time scheme the protensions of "high" and "low" cultures are exposed. The action of the novel alternates between the two. In many novels the novelist upsets the temporal logical sequence as he does in The Victim, Herzog, and Humboldt's Gift by deferring the beginning of the story and choosing a crucial moment in the life of the protagonist to launch him into an apparently unending journey into the psychological time.

Bellow makes an abundant use of irony. Andrew H. Wright defines an ironist thus:

He may, as an observer of the human scene, be moved to compassion, disgust, laughter, disdain, sympathy, or horror - the whole range of reaction is evidently his: what distinguishes him uniquely is a rare and artistically fruitful combination of complexity,

distance, implication.<sup>34</sup>

Bellow approximates to this definition and uses irony for "complexity, distance, implication". Bellow's world view is based on a divided vision, on ambivalence, on the acceptance of mutually exclusive aspects of life. While seeking transcendence, he is deeply rooted in the world, while defending the true self, he stresses its connection with society and while laughing at failure, he underlines its humanness and while looking up to glory of <sup>life,</sup> he exposes its absurdity. In fact as Stephen L. Tanner remarks:

Bellow's understanding that the good that emerges from a conflict of values arises not from the total abandonment or destruction of one set of values but from the building of a new value, sustained, like an arch, by the tension by the original two.<sup>35</sup>

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34 Andrew N. Wright: Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure, Pelicom Books, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 28.

35 Stephen L. Tanner, "The Religious Vision of More Die of Heartbreak", Paul Bellow in the 1980's: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Gloria L. Cronin & L.H. Goldman, p. 290.

Bellow uses not only thematic irony but structural and linguistic as well. It is not necessary to linger on the examples of linguistic irony, but a few cases of structural irony which are embedded in thematic irony can be cited. Most of the Bellow heroes consider it necessary to have ideal constructions in order to come to terms with reality. What usually happens is that they are outmatched and outwitted by reality and have to reconcile themselves to the fact of ordinariness and death. As Richard Poirer observes,

His comedy always has in it the penultimate question before the final one, faced in Seize the Day, of life or death - the question of what can be taken seriously and how seriously it can be taken.<sup>36</sup>

The appearances are not what they look to be. Joseph laughs at the hard-boiledness of a code hero of Hemingway

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Poirer, "Herzog, or, Bellow in Trouble", Saul Bellow: Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Earl Rovit, p. 88.

but at the end of the novel, he opts for the very life which he laughs at. And yet who knows that it is the end and Joseph like Henderson will not come back to from where he started. Similarly Leventhal considers himself to be a victim as do the other protagonists of the novelists but he discovers himself to be a victimiser. He dislikes violence in society but is he himself more aggressive and violent than Allbee, who he thinks is persecuting him. The end of the novel shows that now Leventhal is trying to pursue Allbee and the motif of pursuit is reversed. In Seize the Day Tarkin advises Wilhelm to transcend the material and helps him to do it by running away with the hero's last savings. In the novel Wilhelm endeavours to seize the day and comes very close to what/<sup>tran-</sup>scends it. Herzog and Mr. Sammler's Planet are full of irony. Herzog does not like the imposition of one's will on others but this is what he himself is doing when he tries to have Madeleine act according to his desires, when he goes to kill the lovers. He denies that humanity in Gersbach which he thinks <sup>he</sup> has discovered in himself. Sammler dislikes violence and perversity and yet he admires both. The



black pick-pocket is a part of his own soul. In Humboldt's Gift too we have ample irony. In the words of Judie Newman:

Charlie's attempts to buck out of history, to flee the transcendent, are also treated ironically. He argues that he has to abandon his children in order to do them any real good. He must first seek a transcendent truth. The tables are turned by Renata, however, whose quest for what Charlie always calls "the riddle of your birth" parodies Charlie's own ethereal quest.<sup>37</sup>

In fact Bellow is ever ready for undercutting any solemn thing by his penetrating irony. His way of conveying the sense of truth is by spoofing it, by having "superfluity and solemn nonsense .... laughed out, hooted away by the comic spirit".<sup>38</sup> His works are rich in comedy and usually

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37 Judie Newman, pp. 39-52.

38 Saul Bellow, "Literature", The Great Ideas Today, (New York 1963), pp. 171-73.

it is the comedy of the scoundrels, it is the comedy of those who are helpless failures, it is the comedy of the seekers of big truths who are always inept in little ones of ordinary life. We may laugh at them but we also laugh with them and often through them. It is through Augie that we laugh at Grandma Lausch and Einhorn and others, it is through Herzog that we laugh at Madeleine and it is through Sammler that we laugh at Shula-Splawa and Wallace. While comedy in Bellow is aligned with irony on the one hand, it is aligned with parody and satire on the other. As Stephen L. Tanner notes:

Bellow often parodies or satirizes the quest for enlightenment (Henderson is notable instance), but it is parody or satire intended to generate balance, realism and humility rather than to belittle and destroy.<sup>39</sup>

Bellow's prose style is unique. It is rich in imagery

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<sup>39</sup> Tanner, p. 288.

and symbolism. It is infinitely varied in register and differs from novel to novel. If it is repertorial in Dangling Man and naturalistic in The Victim, it is symbolic in Henderson, lyrical in Herzog and joyous and full-blown in Augie March. The range of Bellow's style can be aptly summed up in the following words of Stephen L. Tanner:

It is garrulous, irrepressible, intelligent, witty, candid, tolerant and idiosyncratically opinionated. It ranges from the erudite to the slangy, from East-West relations to the quality of frozen dinners. It gives the impression of a buzzing cocktail party where you are as likely to run into William Blake as Ronal McDonald.<sup>40</sup>

Bellow's style immensely suits his quest for the essential self, its connection with society and his quest for reality. In spite of the teachings of Derrida and the practice of deauthorizing language and denying its referential

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<sup>40</sup> Tanner, p. 293.

function, Bellow's work, as Michael Yetman puts it,

reminds us that some of the best imaginative writing today continues implicitly to assert the Coleridgean belief that language is a conduit between mind and reality, that words reflect and at the same time interpret, humanize, even "save" through imagination the stuff of literal experience.<sup>41</sup>

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41 Yetman, pp. 429-47.

## 5

## SUMMING UP

It is ironical as well as difficult to sum up a person who does not like either to sum up or being summed up. With his claustrophobia Bellow dreads any kind of reductionism. So the best that can be done is to recapitulate the major lines of enquiry pursued in this study.

The primal concern of Bellow in all his creative writings is the self. Like an ancient "rishi" he tries to pierce the veils of mystery enfolding our being and to discover the true self and "real" reality. Like Bacon he, however, has taken "all knowledge" to be his "province". His range is so wide that it includes not only the latest advances made in the western thought but also the ancient philosophy of India and China and the mythic lore of Africa. His perceptive vision glides over all the contemporary happenings of the world including the Vietnam War, famine in Bangla Desh, the conflict

in the Middle East and, so on.

He explores the reality of the self from the viewpoints of various theories, sociological, psychological and philosophical. For him theories are mere abstractions and not passionately perceived facts. He disagrees with Freud and his psychoanalysis. One of his characters considers psychology as "one of the lower byproducts of modern consciousness, a terrible agitation which we prize as insight".<sup>1</sup> Bellow would be ever ready to agree with him. He does not kowtow to one of the leading figures of existentialism Satre, whom he considers to be funny but who is not all that funny. He compares Sartre to "the Swiftian philosopher extracting sunshine from cucumbers and getting spiders to manufacture silks".<sup>2</sup> He has no respect for those who try to squeeze reality into the moulds of their ideas, theories and formulations. He recognizes that in every generation there is "a leader race of masterminds whose ideas ("class-struggle",

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1 Saul Bellow, More Die of Heart break, (New York: William Morrow, 1987), p. 51.

2 Saul Bellow, To Jerusalem And Back, (Penguin Books, 1985), p. 126.

"Oedipus complex", "identity crisis") come down over us like butterfly nets".<sup>3</sup>

He tries to peel off various layers of false selves which have accumulated upon the true self. He relies more on intuitive understanding than critical analysis because "the accumulation of sensible experience"<sup>4</sup> is not enough. Reality has to be felt rather than seen. Only the true self can feel the reality and face it. It impulsively leads us on to the connection with creation, to transcendental longings, to intimations of immortality. It, however, does not mean that Bellow ignores the demands of the body. As Sarah Cohen correctly maintains:

Bellow sees the body as essential to the functioning of the soul since only through it can the soul exercise its powers.<sup>5</sup>

In his later novels Bellow comes to plumbing the depths

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3 To Jerusalem And Back, p. 118.

4 Boyers, p. 44.

5 Sarah Blacher Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 10.

of the human soul and this thing has been recognized by great writers like Updike who says, "Bellow believes in the soul; this is one of his links with the ancients, with the great books".<sup>6</sup> In fact, one would like to say that it is one of his links with the moderns and provides singular vitality to his vision.

Bellow's transcendental leanings would suggest that he wants to overcome reality by going beyond it and that he wants to preserve the self against the depredations of society. Bellow does not dread reality howsoever dreadful it might be. His novels are a testimony to the fact that his apprehension of reality is more tangible than that of most contemporary writers. The reality that emerges from his novels is multidimensional and his universe is in fact multiverse.

He portrays society to be hostile to the individual and the self. The society is ridden by crime, violence, sexuality and the madness of abstractions and classifications. It tries to overpower the self but it really can overpower only the false self. The society

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6 John Updike, "Toppling Towers Seen by a Whirling Soul", review of The Dean's December, New Yorker, 22 February 1982, p. 127.



is not a mere mechanism or a biological organism as some social thinkers hold. It comprises individuals also. And once an individual recognizes his true self, discovers his soul and rips the veils of "maya" and frees himself from "moha", he does not find society antagonistic to him. Society bears down only on those who are led on by their false selves to live <sup>a</sup> false life, the life of reality instructors, and destiny moulders. This is also the essence of ancient Indian wisdom and Bellow is well acquainted with it.

So the Bellow protagonist affirms society and wishes to live harmoniously with it. He emphasizes the significance of civility, brotherly duty, love for mankind and fulfilling ones contract with God, i.e. one's contract with life. He lays heavy emphasis on ethical values and tries to search for some kind of order in the apparent chaos of life and the world. But this is not to call the novelist conservative. If faith in man and in life earns a person the adjective of conservative, it is infinitely better to be conservative than radical.

What is unique about Bellow's vision is that he

has embodied it in eminently appropriate techniques and styles. Reading his novels one does not see any hiatus between the form and content, the soul and the body of his creative endeavours. What he wishes to reveal could not have been better revealed by narrative techniques other than those he has used. All this makes him a unique creative writer of our times occupying an eminent position among those who have raised their voice for human dignity and love of mankind.

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